# NICKOLEY

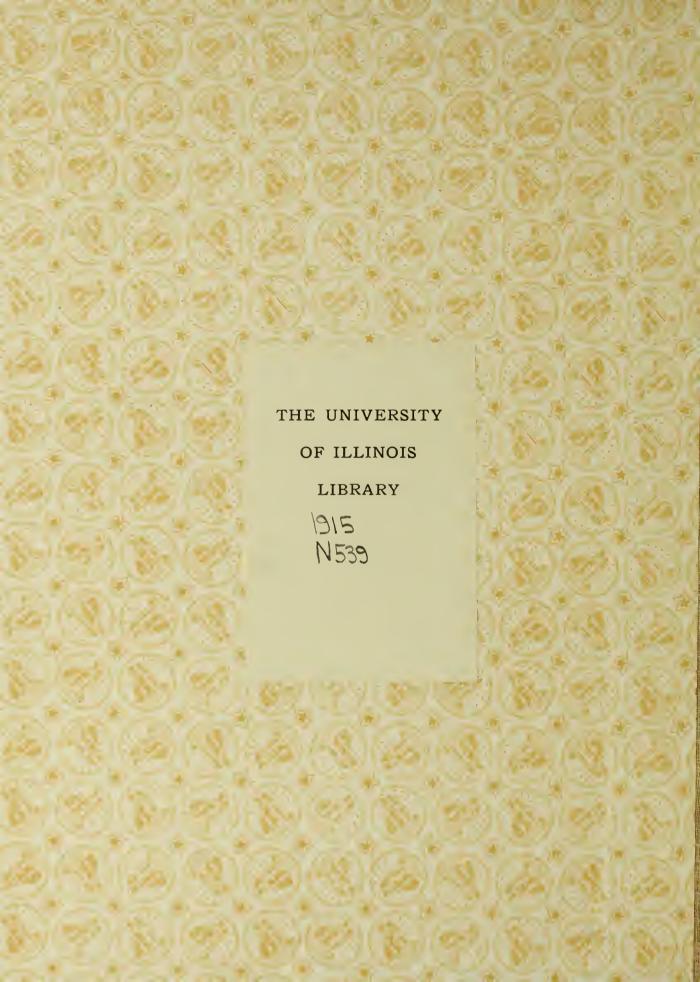
Robert Louis Stevenson on the Art of Fiction

English

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## ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON ON THE ART OF FICTION

BY

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### THESIS

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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

Emma M. Rhvado Nickoley
ENTITLED Robert Louis Stevenson On The Art Of Fiction

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### STEVENSON ON THE ART OF FICTION

### CHAPTER I

#### ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

1"Since long ago, a child at home,
 I read and longed to rise and roam,
 Where'er I went, whate'er I willed,
 One promised land my fancy filled".

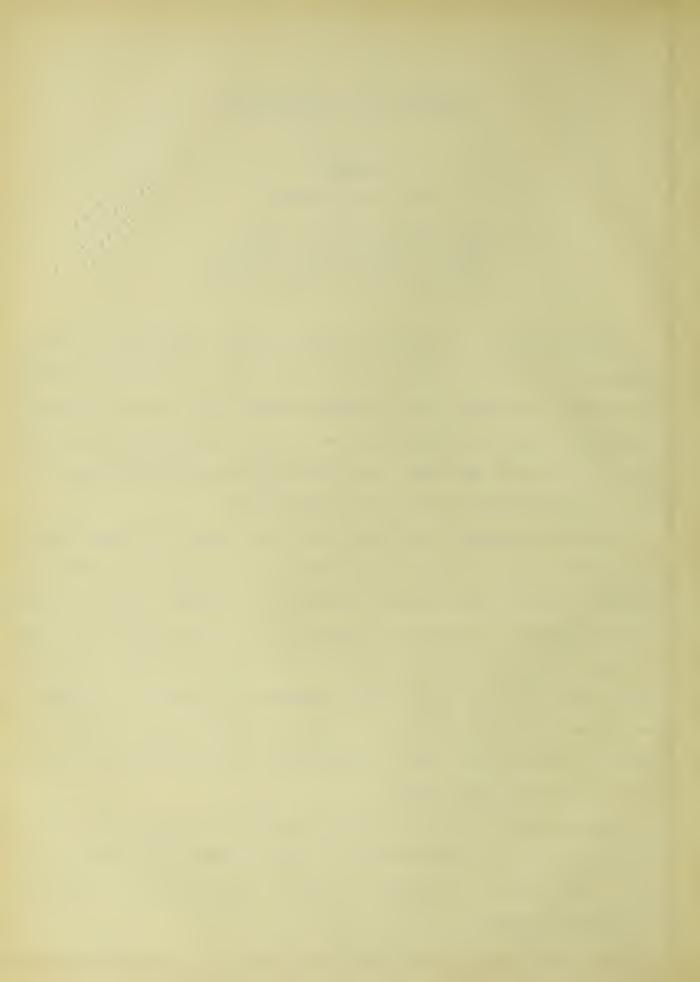
There is among the villagers in the Tyrol a certain adage, which, in translation, reads: "Beyond the mountains there are men also". In the intercretation of this adage one listens to the wholesome philosophy that, no matter what tradition or environment or inheritance has done to hedge one about with circumscribed ideas of life and the day's work, one's vision should include life and work and the great unknown possibilities "beyond the mountains".

It may have been some such Tyrolese vision that caused Robert Louis Stevenson to give heed to the call that bade him discover what existed for him beyond his mountains. From earliest childhood the "mountains" beckoned. They were pictured to him unconsciously, by parents and nurse when they read and reread tales of adventure, of travel by land and sea, of the wonderful cutside world. Looking back over his life, even back to that "braw" November day in Edinburgh in 1850 when he was received into the world, it is to be noted that all the forces of Nature and humanity combined to make him see Visions instead of the plumb line and to exchange for a pen the tools of the engineer.

Much has been written of his precarious health in early years -- too much cannot be written of the courageous effort he made in battle with his physical weakness. That cheeriness of disposition, the happy outlook on life, the persistent

To An Island Princess"

Ballads and Other Poems, pp. 232



optimism that characterizes the man and his books are also revealed in the lad and his sufferings. Mention must be made of that friend of his youth, "Cummie", his nurse, the "comrade of the night watch", who from his infancy bore with him the physical tertures that wracked the frail body and tormented the active soul of her charge. He has himself referred to her as his "second mother". No more pathetically tender picture is drawn of the two than the description of the little body, wearied of coughing, wrapped in a shawl in her arms as she stands by the window through the long watches of the night counting the windows on the street where lights shone and "where other little boys were watching with their nurses for the morning". These nights were all too frequent. Stevenson never forgot them -- could never guite shake off the dread and weariness of a night of watching and suffering. "Go with each of us to rest; and if any awake, temper to him the hours of watching", he prayed in his last bit of writing the night before he died.

Stevenson's boyhood was not lived in the same manner that other boys have enjoyed in the care-free age. The active spirit, fettered by weakness and suffering, found no adequate outlet save in day dreams and fancies fostered by the reading of others or what he himself found in books. Boyish sports, denied so much of the time, never lost their charm. There seemed always a time to be hoped for in the future when sports might be indulged in freely and therefore were worth doing when health permitted. The old-young lad owed his young-old interests in maturity to this continuous hopeful outlook of childhood's years.

"I please myself by saying that I had a Covenanting child-hood" he says of himself. This is doubtless due to "Cummie" who hedged him around with a cast iron faith, from between whose iron pickets he dared not, nor did he wish to, peep during his boyhood out into the saner, broader, more liberal world of religious though It has been said that he never quite completely swung away from the Covenanting forms, although his religious faith underwent a tremendous upheaval in early manhood, and when the settling process had subsided there was little if any "Covenanting" left in his religious life save the few forms of worship he considered important.



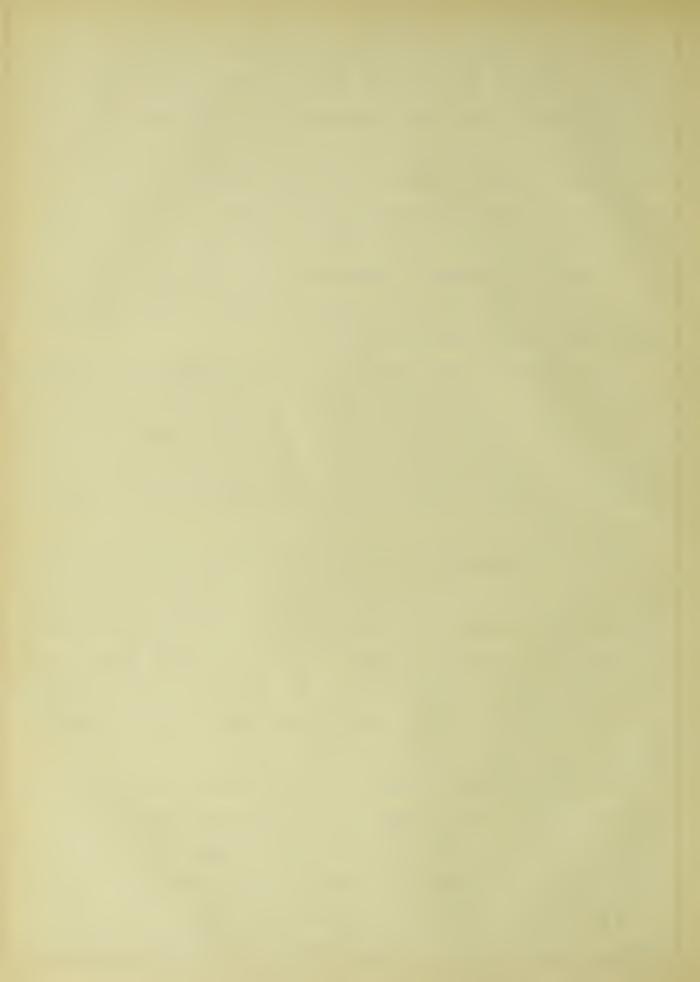
The early schooling was desultory. From the age of seven and for half a dozen years after, Stevenson was irregularly at school and tutors came and went as his health permitted. Following this period his health improved rapidly and sports and schooling alike received more constant attention. His mother refers to him at this time as "wild, and like a boy", and it is to these years that he refers with chuckling tolerance as being his "own ideal, radiating rure romance". As one reads of this "Lantern Bearers" and other episodical bits peculiar to this portion of his life one is led back to read his child's poem "The Land of Story Books" where the "pure romance" is exemplified in the child's play under the shadows by the sofa with gun and hunter's camp, with lions and Indian scouts prowling in the shadowy lamplit evenings of the long ago.

He travelled much in early boyhood but what those travels meant to him we have no definite record. Curiously enough, with all his love for the picturesque and unusual so early developed in him, we find no allusion, no intimate touch of those things surely picturesque and unusual enjoyed during those impressionable years of travel with his parents. We must wait for travel impressions until he begins his vagabonding alone.

All this time Stevenson was surely training nimself in the art of writing.

Doggerel verse appeared; he had a mania for starting magazines, filling them with
fantastic tales of adventure and horrifying incidents only to have them simmer and
die because of his own flagging interest. At the age of sixteen mowever, an onbitious novel, condensed until it became a small pamphlet was published anonymously, under the title "The Pentland Rising: a Page of History 1666", and Stevenson
launched with this frail craft upon the sea of letters.

With this effort Stevenson began his literary career. His vision saw a different port than that of the engineer and the professional career for which his father had destined him. For three years he browsed around the University of Edin burgh, attending classes when the mood moved him, taking lectures more as a pastime than a duty and rarely other than on rainy days when truancy would be unpleasant. Certain note books extant record these lectures in cryptic epigrams or explanations



as to what certain scientific expressions did not mean. He refers to this period of his education as the time when he learned more playing truant than in the class rooms -- and his truancy was planned with deliberate and elaborate care. The practical side of engineering life he did follow somewhat more assiduously, enjoying the rough experience in the shops and among working men as a labourer. His own record of these days, however, are not teeming with Scientific results, but of the thrills he received in a divers suit, in a "boat-coat", efforts in saving drowning men, dangers and the life of chance, most of all of the open air life, the sheer joy of being alive in the world; and all of which is recorded on way or another in his writings.

The removal of his family about this time to Swanston Cottage was a matter of physical and literary benefit to Stevenson. Nestled among the Pentland Hills with an outlook everywhere upon picturesque views of hill and dell, Stevenson lived, and loved the seasons in their turn, dispensing generous hospitality to the many friend who sought him in this retired spot. Health, best of all, came a-visiting here, riding, skating, coasting with him as the seasons passed. Edinourgh was not neglected; friends of school and college days, the Speculative Society, private theatricals drew him to the city. The "Spec", as it was familiarly called, claimed his greatest attention and it was through the membership in this society that he first came in contact with his contemporaries in fiction. For years Stevenson's subconscious mind had yearned for the world of letters as his goal. Ingineering had bored, defied him. He felt that time and talent were bling worse then wasted in the pursuit of a career in which he had no human interest. The "Spec" encoraged his day dresm of literary longings. He had begun, also, to draw his own line of demarkation between the substance and shadov in religious thought and practice, called himself a free thinker because he could no longer honestly subscribe to the Coverant Doctrines, nor account for or have sympathy with the discrepancies between religious doctrines and the practice of religious ideals. Socialist notions began hammering for entrance and occupancy in his thought. In a vord, Stevenson was pass ing through a metamorphosis common enough in a youth of Stevenson's temperament and



easy enough to direct by those who have sympathy and uncerstanding. Unfortunately for him, nowever, in none of these disturbing thoughts was his father sympathetic nor could that father's well ordered mind and logical reasoning comprehend the significance or importance of the son's questioning attitude. The first rupture between father and sou came in the spring of 1871 when Stevenson, then twenty years of age and naturally eager to get at his life work, told his father definitely his attitude toward the profession of Ingineering and expressed his wish to follow literature as a career. For years Stevenson did not cease to wince when he thought of his father's bitterly disappointed answer, "What! no profession?"

The study of law was finally settled upon as a compromise but, like most compromises, it failed to satisfy. Save for one appearance in court, Stevenson's career as a lawyer ended with his admittance to the Scottish bar in 1875.

The father's humiliation over his son's choice of a career was deepened into silent dispair on his realization of the son's "atheistic" tendencies. Naturally reticent on religious matters, father and son carried each a sore, sore heart in silence, and the two drifted farther and farther apart. Not until years afterward did the Covenanting father and repelling son become a ything like reconciled on this particular phase of the younger man's experience, one wonders if the father even did thoroughly understand.

Stevenson's lealth continued to improve most satisfactorily. Sove for or occasional breakdown from natural causes, and an attack of diptheria, the convalescence from which being retarded because of his naturally weak constitution, he was

<sup>&</sup>quot;Hence the long roads my home I made;
Tossed much in ships: have often laid
Below the uncurtained sky my head,
Rain-deluged and wind buffeted:
And many a thousand hills I crossed
And corners turned -- Loves labour lost,..."

To An Island Frincess.



enjoying for the first time in his life a temporary respite from chronic ill health Law was definitely abandoned as a profession and he began to devote himself seriously to literature. He was his own sternest of taskmasters. He set himself the task of learning to write by writing, of learning to write better by reading what others had written. He travelled much, often alone, sometimes with boon companion, but always with the firm conviction that "beyond the mountains there are men also".

It was to know those "men" that he spent much time in France, England, Scotland, learning what he could of nature, men, and the world of books. We have the record of these travels and what they meant to him in the tales he has left to us. Of the friends he made and clung to throughout his life he has culogized in his "Letters", and the books that came to be as dear to him as human friends have honored mention and appreciation in those writings in which he acknowledges his cebts to the world of letters. And there is none more fair than he in his appreciation of those who influenced him in the formative period of his literary career.

In the company of one of his tried friends in 1878, Stevenson made his Inland Voyage and it was on the return from this voyage to the Colony of Grez that he met Mrs. Osbourne. Stevenson had never cared to know vomen in a social way. He never wrote of women when he could avoid it. One has the feeling that either he did not understand the sex or that he was, perchance, afraid to attempt the problem. At any rate, Stevenson's women are not interesting, they are not even entertaining, they seem eerie creatures and should they dissolve into mist and suddenly float out of the book their going would detract none from the interest of the volume. But here was a woman, the magnetic force of whose character drew Stevenson at once to humble worship. "Love at first sight" is the trite phrase used to express the bond that is mediately united the two in common sympathy and deep attachment. Trs. Osbourne was a legal wife but an unhappy one. She had two children and was several years Stevenson's elder. The possibility of anything more than friendship seemed hopelessly remote but Stevenson's hope lay in that vision "beyond the mountains". The grief with which he knew his family would receive his confession of his love for her kept the attachment a secret one and when Mrs. Osbourne left for America



his horizon was very dark. To but few, very few of his friends could be speak of his socrow at parting from her and even from them he received but scant sympathy.

During the year of separation Stevenson tried to busy himself in the old way, travelling, writing, reading, making friends, with his heart beyond the seas. Disquiet ing news came back to him, her domestic life was irrevocably shattered, she was very ill. Then the message came that, without unnecessary mublicity and distress to her family and friends, she might be released by the Courts of California. With hopes and anxieties succeeding hopes and anxieties, Stevenson felt he could stand the strain no longer and his sudden determination to go to the States caused consternation to his friends. They hade every effort to dissuade him, and, largely because of their attitude, Stevenson felt it useless to consult his parents and without discussing the matter with them, left for America in August 1879. For economy's sake the voyage was taken in second Cabin. In consequence Stevenson suffered many hardships but withal, enjoyed tremendously his freedom of intercourse with the emigrants.

The railway journey west after his arrival in New York he refers to as the maximum of discomfort. The result was a complete physical breakdown which took weeks to repair. The old spectre, ill-health, again pursued him; another, more for addable, more grimly determined—exhausted means and but slender source of supply—came to haunt him. He was too ill for the regular grind of writing, too hopeless of recognition from home to apply to his parents, and for a few months he lived a precarious existence with only his stubtorn courage and his vision of better days to come that kept him from absolute despair. Mrs. Osbourne's health was greatly inproved, the one bright light in his firmament. He speaks of this time of suffering as "by all rights I should have died"; but a waiting genius kept him alive. San Francisco from the standpoint of health was out of the question. A trip to ricturesque Monterey, a quiet rest among these simple Mexicans, quite to his taste, refreshed him in mind and body.

On his return to San Francisco his prospects were not bright. He occupied cheap lodgings, ate cheaper food, but he was never idle, never vanquished. He found econ-

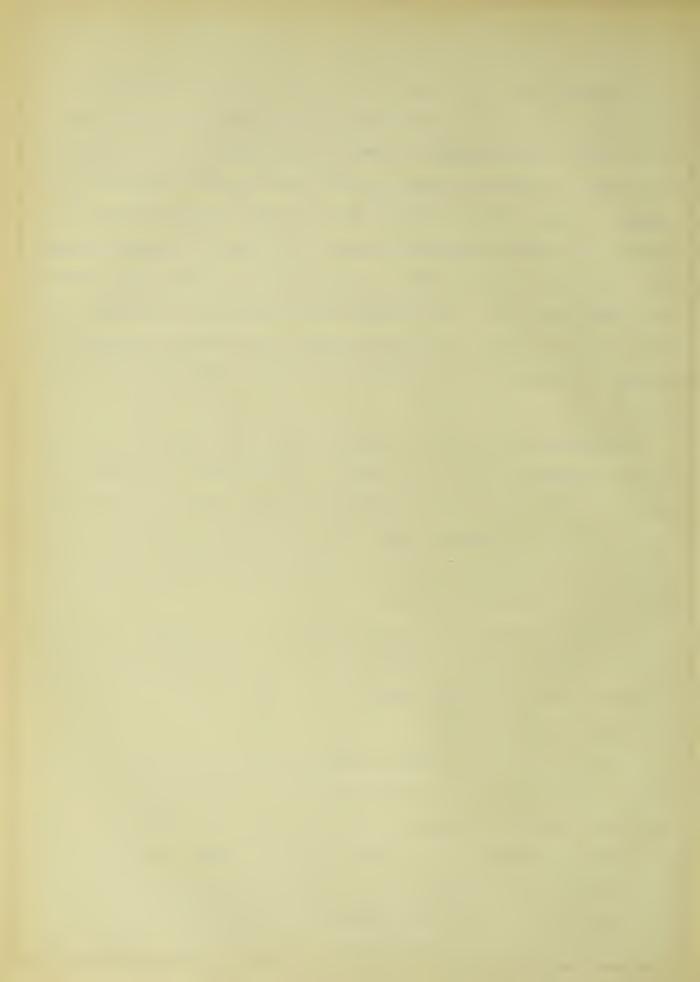


ony "as good a game of rlay as any other". But to keep the tot boiling Stevenson worked tirelessly to the point of exhaustion. The treak came at the end of a period of voluntary mursing of a sick child and, but for the timely intervention of Mrs. Osbourne, would have died, lonely, poor, estranged from his people, and as near the point of discouragement as he ever allowed himself to get. Fortunately, Mrs. Osbourne had secured her divorce and took over the task of nursing him back to health. Slowly, with the recovery, began to filter out to him from home the assurance of help and friendliness on the part of his father. Misunderstandings were cleared up and in April, 1850, his father assured him of two hundred and fifty pounds sterling per year. As one obstacle after another was cleared away, health, such as it was, came back, and the final triumph of his life was, according to his own record, his marriage to Fanny Van de Grift-Osbourne on May 19th, 1850, at San Francisco.

Immediately after marriage, the Stevenson's with Mrs. Stevenson's small son, left for the mountains north of San Francisco. Their isolated independence was a joyous existence, for the town was a deserted mining camp and they lived as they chose. Save for the temporary illness of Mrs. Stevenson and Lloyd Osboarne with diptheria, nothing warred the happiness of their existence there, the record of which we find in "Silverado Squatters".

For some time Steverson had been planning to go back to Ingland. The reconciliation with his father and the knowledge that his friends were eagerly awaiting to welcome his wife for his sake spurred him to action and late in August found him greeting his family at Liverpool.

It was soon found that a winter in Edinburgh would be impossible, for Stevenson's year of hardship had quite broken his health. From this time, it may be said, began his period of wandering in search of health, to be ended in the South Seas. Davos and the Highlands were first tried and at first succeeded. Stevenson improved here in the "giddy air" but led, necessarily ,a circumscribed life. Between the two winters spent there the Stevenson's travelled much. Of this period in his literary career the results are many. He was never idle. Fiction, essay,



quaintances with old ones. On one occasion Frs. Stevenson was quite seriously ill and mended slowly. Once the end seemed to have come for Stevenson. A violent and dangerous bemorrhage attacked him and coupled with this, opthalmia and sciatica. He suffered the most intense pair, and inconvenience. His right arm was strapped to his side lest action induce another hemorrhage, absolute silence or speech for the same reason, darkness because of the eye difficulty, all this, and yet this cheery spirit passed his time by writing with his left hand with words he could not see, the greater part of the "Child's Garden" and "Requien."

The three years following his recovery from this "triple" illness Stevenson spent in Ergland. In January of 1865 Thomas Stevenson bought for his daughter-in-law a house at Bournemouth for which his son at once felt the deepest attachment and christened it Skerryvore in monor of a certain light house the most difficult or cremitecture and erection, which the family had erected. Spring found them settled in their new home and Stevenson as happy as a child in this new possession. Here friends came and went at will, here he revived his old love of music, and extracted keen pleasure from those all too few activities his vaning health permitted. He seldom stepped beyond the gates of Skerryvore, was often confined to his room, and was never wholly free from wearying attacks upon his feetle strength. But courage did not fail, the restless intellect was not to be kept subdued. "The Technical Elements of Style" was, as he expresses it, the work of five days spent in bea.

In the summers he occasionally left Bournemouth but not for long; the weariness of travel, the fatigue occasioned by a strange surrounding, all told upon his health. London, Cambridge, Paris, were visited a few times during these few years but zest for travel for travel's sake had grown cold. The clear Stevensons had taken a nouse in Bournemouth the winter of 1837 to be near their son. It was here that the feeble, broken, father whose state of health had been alarming for some time, became so ill that he was hurried to Edinburgh. When the son followed



shortly after he was too late for recognition and two days later, on May the Sth the elder Stevenson's life had closed. The younger man had taken cold, was too ill to attend the funeral and for several weeks was kept, by reason of his illness, at Edinburgh. This proved to be his last visit to his native city, and he was shortly to look for the last time upon England. He was steedily growing weaker and to all that knew him it was evident that the light of his life was burning low. His father gone, his mother was free to follow her son, which she agreed to do most eagerly the following August, when, after a severe hemorrhage, Stevenson, a mere shadow of health, left England for the States in a last effort to find a place where he might live.

I came, not hoping; and, like one Snatched out of blindness, rubbed my eyes, And hailed my promised land with cries."

Once again we find Stevenson lookin, with steadfast hope beyond his nountains. His life thus far had been a weary journey with all too few rests beside the stony road. He did not ask for much, a little health, a little wealth, a little leisure to enjoy them. They came to him singly but never together. And now then he set sail on his quest for health, the little wealth was almost within his grasp, but the enforced leisure was irksome.

The journey across was without incident as his former journey had been. But the reception in New York was to receive a famous man rather than the unknown "inmigrant" of a few years back. A winter's home was selected in the Adirondacks where, as the season wore on, every known variety of weather was produced. Curiouly enough Stevenson thrived while the other members of his family suffered keenly from the cold and uncertainty of the climate. The season here was productive of considerable writing and an intense enjoyment of all that was 'round about him.

<sup>1</sup>To An Island Princess



Plots of stories simmered, and plans for more serious writing took shape. It was on these cold winter nights that Stevenson also began to dream of a yachting cruise When Mrs. Stevenson left on a visit to her people in California he urged her looking into the matter of some sort of boat by which they might take this cherished trip.

In the early spring while visiting in New York he received a telegram from his wife advising him of the possibility of hiring the yacht "Casco" for a voyage in the South Seas. Stevenson made preparations at once and in June was in California. The eagerness with which he planned every detail of the voyage, the joy in his anticipation as to what this voyage would do in regard to his health, was almost pathetic. He allowed no time to be lost and three weeks after his arrival in San Francisco he had set sail to his "promised land" into the sunset.

For upwards of three years the Stevensons lived on the Pacific, visiting the islands, delighting in the experiences the travel brought them, enjoying even the hardships and dangers that attended them at times. The true, wholesome and delight ful picture of those years is to be found in that most readable volume "In The South Seas". Temporary residences were established in various places. The excosures necessary on such a voyage were not always beneficial to Stevenson. There were times when wife and mother feared for his life in the attacks that came and massed. But the spirit kept alive. Stevenson lived, flourished, wrote steadily when not actually too ill and constantly fought the spectre of ill health. Everywhere he west upon every island he touched, he made friends among a people whose language he knew only through an interpreter. He took an interest in their life, their religion, their customs, their politics. He proved himself their friend in time of need, their hail-fellow" in time of rejoicing. In the island of Molokai, that hopelessly sad eper colony where he remained a week, he spent much of that time teaching the chilren to play croquet, poor, pitiful little beings upon whom the dread desease had tready set its stamp. He mingled freely with them refusing the slightest precautionary measures lest he might remind these little ones of the cruel fate of their ives.



The names of the tlaces they visited, the sweet, smooth-flowing, musical language nightly delighted Stevenson. The picturesque faces and garments were never ending sources of pleasure. The native music enchanted him. He determined to change the original plan of a winter home in Madeira to a home at Samoa. It was not as attractive a place as others he had visited but it had rare mail facilities and the regular monthly boats that stopped at Apia connected him more directly with the outside world than any other place he had discovered to be, in other ways, suitable. He therefore bought a large tract of ground, undeveloped, and work was begun upon a suitable residence while he journeyed on to Sydney expecting to go on to England. He fell ill again, a severe hemorphage and general lassitude planted Mrs. Stevenson and they set out at once for the Islands. Save for one other trip to Sydney and one to Honolulu, Stevenson remained until the end on the Island of Samoa, his new home, his last resting place.

He had alread; been introduced along the people lere as "Tusitala", "the liter of tales" by his missionary friend, the Reverend J. F. levell, and it was by that name that he was known to all the people. Up to this time he had been regarded as a tourist, now he was a citizen among them. With amozing rapidity he gathered a working knowledge of the language and with singular adapticility and good the promise "tly reople shall be my people". Their politics were his, their oustons he adopted, their life he lived, vorking, loving, living a life that brough him confort and ease from physical troubles, a joynus recommense at last after the weary road he had travelled to this "provised land". Here he consecuted in hely. He lived a joyous almost reckless life in the open. "Farming is a desease" he wrote his friends, and from this he never was cured. His per was prolific. Assisting him, at this time, was Mrs. Stevenson's daughter, Mrs. Strong, who, with her so, was a member of the family at Vailina. As Amanuerses she was invaluable to "teven She was tireless in her efforts to be of the as. i. tarce be reeded and nost patient under all conditions, particularly after the summer of '92 when he was the tened with writer's cramp.



Stevenson sorely missed his friends in this exile but aside from that it may to said that the few years he was permitted to live in his chosen promised land were peculiarly happy ones. He was surrounded by those he loved best, health was better than it had been for years, continuous life in the open and the Bohemian manner in which he felt free to live it were to his taste, a certain prestige among the peoples of the island was not unwelcome, and a knowledge that he was of use and value to these people gave him the comforting assurance that life was worth while. There were times when the longing for home, and meather and Highland crags made him wish to leave everything, sacrifice everything, for a glimpse of the dear land from which he was underiably an exile. But this was not to be and with the patience and fortitude which only such minds as Stevenson's could exercise he remained the exile.

The end came suddenly as one would wish it to be for one whose life had held so much suffering. Five minutes before he was stricken, with characteristic observant good humor he was cusied doing what he could to relieve a strange forboding on the part of his wife and making a little feest as troper climax for the day of toil

He lies where he wished to lie, resting beside the weary road he travelled, or a spot that looks out to sunrise and sunset, where birds live and sing undisturbed. The echo of the mighty Pacific but faintly reaches the traveller the climus the steep hillside to read on the great tomo erected there by his Camoan friends his "Requiem", and to look out upon the green hills on either side, and the ocean, beyond whose waters was the land he loved even as only an exile can love his home.

Many tributes have been paid Stevenson, many memorial in criptions and rillars and tablets have been erected in his honor. We are prone to monor our dead for self-gratification. But the finest tribute and the most loving inscription ever awarded him came during his lifetime. Stevensonsinterest in the people of Samoa was genuine and deep seated. He spared no pains in doing for them as he saw they needed particularly those in trouble. Certain Mataafa chiefs imprisoned for political reasons and for him an elaborate feast on his return from Honolulu in 1893 and im-



mediately upon their release in 1894, as a mark of gratitude they, with many voluntary helpers, cleared, dug and completed the roadway that leads to the house.

Many weeks and many men were needed for this gigantic task, and in the giving of this unique gift, the chiefs laid emphasis on the promise that, so long as Stevensor should use that road his feet should never be wearied with the dust or the mad, so well should the road be kept. And the name of this road was "Ala Loto Alofa", "the Road of the Loving Heart". Two short months passed between the completion of this gift and the other road which the chiefs cut that December morning and upon which they afterward bore to the summit of Vaca, the Loving Heart that meant so much to them in life and would continue to live with them while Memory lasts.



## CHAPTER II

## HIS CULTURE

It is impossible to write of the culture of Stevenson without a backward gland at his ancestry. In speaking of his forbears he says, "On the whole the Stevensons may be described as decent, reputable folk, following honest trades - millers, maltsters, and doctors, playing the character parts in the Vaverly Povels with propriety, if without destinction...."

Upon the very early ancestry it is unmecessary to dwell. Stevenson, himself, seemed core concerned with the anecdotes and fanciful tales manded down to him from past generations than with such actual facts as no was a letto gather together. It suffices him to know that he was of a sturdy Cootch ancestry, that there was enough remarkic adventure to account for his own inherited testes, that they were nonest and true and faithful to a trust. His own record of "A Family of Engineers" is as adightful a bit as he has given us. He has achieved the almost impossible feat of making a family history as entertaining as if it were fictitious. The philosophical chuckle at some ancestral absurdity, the wai sical and often satirical reference to ancestral ambitions for their offspring, of ancestral worm ip itself, have no sting. One smiles comprehendingly and understands more thoroughly Stevenson's sense of humor which, throughout his life, was the bridge over which he crossed many a formidable obstacle in his with.

With his peternal grandfather cane the recognized profession of Engineering.

According to Stevenson, this profession was an absorbing passion throughout his grandfather's life and to his son he bequeathed the same interest and fascination in the work. Knowing this, that son's bevildered disampointment in Stevenson's

Family of Engineers, pp. 220



rejecting the profession for another of les gratefying interests to the father is understandable. Building lighthouses was signally serving the world and at once recognized. The practical mind could not at once grasp the significance of that literary lighthouse which Stevenson hoped to erect and which was destined to throw its beacon light out over generations to come.

With all the disappointment and misunderstanding and silent grief on the one side, Stevenson on the other hand, while swinging away from the work of his ancestors, jeclously guarded the characteristics that the lighthouse builders had bequeathed him. Love of life, of work ,of nature; the importance of a good foundation for theories and principles; patience, endurance, terseverance; all these things were necessarily a part of his training as a lighthouse builder, and all these things he applied to his creative literature.

Perhaps as great an influence as any exerted in his life was that of his friends. The chief place among these might, perhaps, be given to his consin, Robert A. M. Stevenson of whom he says,

"Ly cousir Bob...is the man likest and most unlike to be that I have ever met. Our likeness was one of tastes and pasions, and, for many years at least, it amounted in these particulars to an identity. He had the not incefationable, feverish mind I have ever known; he not acquired a shartering of almost ever; knowledge and art; he would surprise you by his playing, his reinting, his writing, his criticism, his knowledge of philosophy, and, above all, by a tort of vague, isconnected, and totally inexplicable crudition. What was specially his, and genuine was his faculty for turning over a subject in a conversation. There was an inspecting in his conclusions; a singular, huncrous cloquence it his language, and a power of method, bringing the whole of life into the focus of the subject under cand; none of which I have ever heard equalled or even approached by any other talker. I am sure that he and I together have, in a brief, conspectory

ef. Life of Robert Louis Stevenson by Graham Belfour, op. 102-103-104.



manner, turned over the stuff of a year's reading in one half now of talk.

He was the mo. t valuable man to talk to, above all in his younger days; for he twisted like a serpent, changed like the patterns in a kaleidoscope, transmigrated (it is the only word) from one roint of view to another vith a swiftness and completeness that left a stupid and merely logical mind parting in the rear; and so, in an incredibly brief space of time, helped you to view a question upon every side. In sheer transmancy of mind, I have ever been his numble and distant follower. The multiplicity and swiftness of his apprend sions, if they do not bewilder, at least paralyse his mind. He is utterly without measure. He will spend a week in regulating the expenses of an imaginary navy; and then in ten minutes crush a subtle fallacy or create a new vein of criticism....."

Such a personality as this must have been a most valuable stimulant to a receptive mind like Stevenson's; that sort of inspiration productive of keen mental activity. Of all his relatives, this one man seems to have been the only one with whom he had a sympathetic understanding on the vital things with which his mind was occupied.

It is due to the influence of Charles Baxter that Stevenson so often turned back the pages of his life in reminiscence. Bexter, he says, was "a great maxer of reminiscences", and encouraged Stevenson in his backward glances upon his youth so rion in anecdote and tingling with incident. They were most devoted friends understanding each other perfectly. Few of his friends were prompted to enter as neartily into Stevenson's delightful foolishness when the mood was on as did Yexter. The tale is told of the two prowling along the streets of Edinourgh during student days seriously discussing some weighty problem in which hot, were interested. Of a sudden Stevenson saw a name over a shop door that pleased his fancy and they spent the rest of the afternoon rayhing on the makes of all the shops they passed, and listening with delighted interest to the inexhauntible eloquence of the street vendors. Throughout the duration of their friendship they seemed to walk hand in hand, be the mood grave or say. They fillingly met each other



half way in all discussions, problematical or nonsensical; and so there was their understanding of each other that, no natter how greatly they might disagree, there was never a suspicion of unpleasantness. To Baxter also he gives credit for teaching him "the art of advice"... "a han who could both make helpfol augsestions and at the same time hold his tongue when he had none to offer".

The memory of Charles Baxter's college commadania and continuous friends in kept him enshrined in Stevenson's heart as a friend to whom he might turn in any extremity. In a period of exile while trying to live in Scotland ofter his return from America, Stevenson discouraged with the life of solitude he hast live writes to his friend and urges him to "write he semething oneery. A little Tdirburgh gossis, in Heaven's name. An! what would I of give to steal this evening with you through the big, echcing a lleg archieg, and away so to under the street lamps, and away to dear Brash's, no defunct! But the old time is dead also, never never to revive. It was a san time too, but so gay and so hopeful, one we have said sport with all our low smirits and all our littress s, that it looks like a kind or lamplit fairyland, behind se. O for ten Fdinburga sinutes - six eres bet een us, and the ever clorious Lothian Road, or dear Lysterious !eith lalk! But her, a sheer bulk, lies roor Tom Bowling; here in this strang rlace, whose very strange ness would have been heaven to his then; and as irea, jes, C. B., vita tears, ofter the past. See what comes of being left clone. Do you runemer Frash? the sheet of plass that we followed along George Street? Cranton? the fift of Bonny mainhead? the commass mean the sign of the Tviraling Tye? the night I lay on the paverent in disery?....."

There is a draught of memory's vine here, a vine viose riducst flavors here fellowship, and understanding and appreciation and inspiration - a rich meritage to the man who is rome buring.

<sup>&</sup>quot;It is only now when I come to describe that I have been strange a

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>Letters, Vol. I, pp. 265

Life of Robert Louis Stevenson by Cra Am Balfour, Vol. I, pn. 105.



crew were my as ociates", says fleverson, writing of these friends. And in lead, he added his own share of strangenes, to the "crew" - not in the tracical manner of Ferrier, nor with the slow, methodical shyneas of fir Valter Cimpson. was no sayless about Stevenson except when in the college of a lar, and centairly no element of tragedy entered into his entertainment of his friends. He revelled in mad pranks. The "Libbel" incident, thick originated with Stevenson and his cousin "5.5", is but one of man, such. His keen perception, ready it, the uncanny ability of combining unreal with real, acted as a refreshing tonic upon his friends and the "crew" were ever loyal to him in whatever mood he might chance to be. That loyalty had a marked effect upon Stevenson even when it had become a mere memory, mellowed by time and separation. He looked back in after years and with synpathetic appreciation touched upon the influence each of these intinates had upon his receptive mind. The highest tribute of all he pays to that older and more serious friend, Professor Fleeming Jenkin. Older both in years and experience, he gave to Stevenson what no other friend had yet been able to give him the result of mature thought and judgment on all things that had puzzled his young friend in philosophy and religion. It is recorded that Professor Jenkin loved Stevenson best of all his friends, and one has but to glance into the "Memoir of Fleming Jenkin" to realize what a wholesome, effective influence he had upon Stevensor and how, in turn, Stevenson returned that love, pressed down and running over.

One might speak indefinitely of other friends. Mrs. Situell (now Lady Colvin and, through her Sidney Colvin himself, were important additions to the list of friends who influenced him. It was que to the instigation of Sidney Colvin, the first of taids the home circle to recognize his genius and give encouragement when encouragement was needed, that Stevenson began his career as a professional riter

of. Life of Robert Louis Stevenson by Granam Ralfour, Wol. I, pp. 109-111.



He was hisself a writer and a critic, and had a genius for becoming a friend of editors. His intimacy with Stevenson, beginning professionally, proved to be a valuable social stimulant as well.

The friendship for W. E. Henley, whom Stevenson found, ill and discouraged, in an Edinourgh hospital had an unfortunate termination. For a period lasting over some years they seemed mutually happy. It may have been that flevenson inspired greater friendship than he returned, or that the friend him was of a sporadic growth to die when put to the final test. At any rate, Stevenson's areas grew cold. Henley resented it and jealous, prompted a faither attack to three Stevenson baid slight heed but a neersing which his friends found it have to remain passive.

Put those friends ande in later years did not meen to him what the "in most helf-dozen" of Edinburgh lays weart - that "strange crew" that our min much joy to remarker. He valued these friends of his maturity; they helped in to charify his own judgments, and intensify his own ideals. But so not he beened to be walte to bind them to his soul with the sale hads of steel that college days forged. He realized this and coices his sentiment or the matter in his little Sected poem on Friendship:

"It's an overcome south for age an' just a An' it prooks with mae de ist.
That the degrest friends are the authest friends An' the young are just on trial.

There's a rival bauld wi' young an' auld An' its him that has bereft me; For the surest friends are the auldest friends And the maist o' min. The left me.

There are kind hearts still, for friends to fill And fools to take an' break them; But the hearest friends are the auldest friends And the grave's the place to seek them."

bailads and Other Poems, pp. 196



Stevensor's enthusiash for books and their stimulating messages to dim never waned. We could not be called a student in the scholastic sense of the work. He never amplied hi self to those studies in which he had little interest; but to those in which he was interested his devotion was keen. In his student days he wasted his time in the classical class rooms. He abandoned Greek as no eless after the first to ial but continued for about two years to keep up a flickering interest in Intin. In later years a deep and genuine interest in Latin vriters was aroused and Stevenson that a keen pleasure in reading and translation as well as in the classical history rolative to the noetry which has now come to mean so much to lim. Virgil's Aeneid, The Felogues, Livy, the Odes of Hornee, fascinated him. To fully enjoy them he set himself the thick of a certain instant of Latin France, which he had neglected in his student days. With characteristic faithfulness to amplie: it walf until he achieved a certain measure of success. We fird, were and there, a bit of v rse with a breath of the classics about it, or some stately bit of raythmic prose that sings as Virgil sang. The ampeal of the literature of the ancients was so strong that it was not unusual for visitors to find Stevenson proppel up in bed, too ill for speech, but passing the weary time of waiting in rending the Aeneid, his own paysical battle forgotton in the exciting our entures of the men of Troy.

Throughout his life he looked upon books as the reduce from affiliation and sorrow and care, or when the great loreliness and longing for home come over induring his randerings in those years of enforced exile. He tells up that " oks were the proper remedy: books of vivid human i port, forcing upor the minus of young men the issues, pleasures, busyness, importance, and immediately of that life in which they stand; books of smiling or heroic telever, to excite or emable; books of a large design, shadowing the complexity of that galls of consequence to validh we assist down, the homest-back not least"

The truest influences in broks, he says, are in the marks of flotion. ""They "Letters and discellances", to. 302-303



do not min the reader to a dogma, which he must afterwards discover to be idexact; they do not teach him a lesson, which he must afterwards unlearn. They report, they reprenge, they clarify the lessons of life; they disengage us from ourselves they constrain us to the acquaintance of others; and they show us the web or experience, not as we can see it for ourselves, out with a singular change - that monstrees, consuming ego of ours being, for the nonce, struck but."

To Snakespeare, and especially the characters of Hamlet and Rosalind, he owed his greatest debt. Endowed as Stevenson was with an impressionable mind, the rest drawn interpreted by the test players constituted for him the nughest type of enjoyment and pleasure. The next best "friend" in fiction for him was, by his own account, "the elderly D'Artagnan of the <u>Viconte de Braselonne</u>. I know not a nore human soul, nor, in his way, a filer; I shall be very sarry for the man who is so much of a pedant in morals that he cannot learn from the Captair of "meroteers".

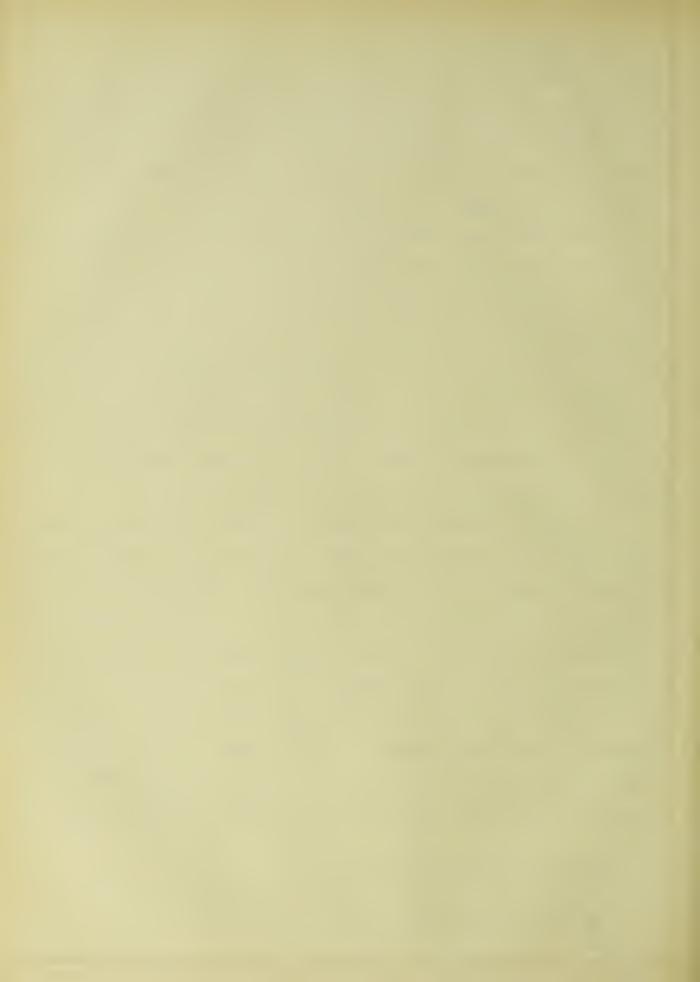
The "Pilgrims Progress" completes the trio of greatest importance to him - "a book that breathes of every beautiful and valuable emotion".

In a review of the other books which he mentions as exerting especial influence on his thought and writings one pauses and corners at the types and unlietles of interests included. We are told, suddenly, that the New Testarent and especially the Gospel of St. Matthew is worth "reading as a book, not droningly and fully, like a partion of the Bille". Who but Stevenson could have so saillfully veil if this criticism of Bible reading in general and the gospel stories in particular! In the same breath he jolts us along toward the outdoors on a of Malt Whitman and induces us to read "Leaves of Grass, a book of singular service, a book which tumbles the world upside down for me, blew into space a thousand convebs of genteel and ethical illusion, and, having thus saaken my tapernacte or lies, set me back

<sup>1</sup>Letters and Liscellanics, pp. 303

Letters and Liscellanies, pp. 304

<sup>3</sup> bid



again upon a strong foundation of all the original and manly virtues. But it is, once more, only a book for those who have the gift of reading."

It would seem to the casual student of literature a far or, from Walt Writman to derbert Spencer but Stevenson arifts easily, naturally from the rusped literary heretic of rhyme to this heretical philosopher. Whithan and start a the train of thought that shook his "tabernacle of lies" and sent him a-pondering on the idea that "the average man lives, and must live, so modely in convention, that gumpowder charges of the truth are more apt to discommose than to invigorate his creed. Either he cries out woon blaspheny and indecency, and arouse as the closer round that little idea of part-truths and part-conveniences which is the contemporary feity, or he is convinced by what is use, for jets that is all, and becomes truly blasphenous and indepent himself. New truth is only useful to supplement the old; rough truth is only wanted to expand, not to destroy, our civil and often closent conventions."

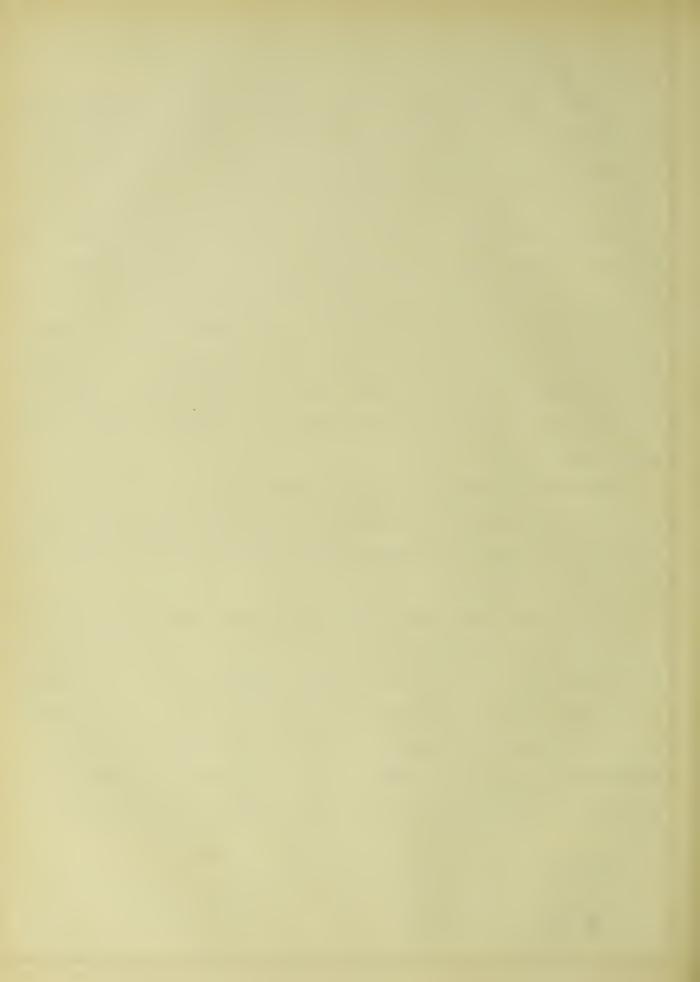
Stevenson calls Chencer a "legislasive raboi" - gives his the binefit of the lought as to the unrability of the fabric me had constructed, compliments his on his nonesty of conviction and concludes by calling himself "a mound if I lost my gratitude to Herbert Spencer."

"I know no one whom I less addire than Joethe;" he says, "he seed a very epitome of the sins of genius, breaking open the doors of trivate life, and relight ly wounding friends, in that crowning offence of Marther, and in his own character a mere pen-and-ink Navoleon, conscious of the rights and duties of surface talents as a Spanish inquisitor was conscious of the rights and duties of his office.."

And yet none has paid higher tribute to Goethe than Stevenson, conscious in his appreciation of Goethe's honest and servicable friendship for Social ar and the

<sup>1</sup> ivil 305

<sup>;</sup> ibid 306



lessons it contained for him.

"I shall never forgive myself if I forget The Levist .... Satire, the enery picture of human faults, is not great art; we can all a angry with our neighbor; what we want is to be shown, not his defects, of which we are too conscious, out hi merits, to which we are too blind . And The Egoist is a satire; so much must be allowed; but it is a satire of a singular quality, which tells you nothing of that orvious mote, vaich is engaged from first to last with the t invisible beam. It is yourself that is hunted down; these are your own faults that are dragged into the day and numbered, with lingering relish, with cruel cunning and precision". It is to be seen from this quotation and immunerable other passages that Stevenson read with an eye single to one purpose. Books, he celieved, marticularly fiction, was the simple holding of the Mirror up to Nature. If, that Mirror reverled himself, if he recognized in the form reflected aught of good or bad in him, it at once irfluenced his thought concerning his own mental and physical activities. If the wirror reflected "the life of that little, tecutiful brother vion we case all har, and vnow we have all lost and mourned, the man we or git to have terr, the man we hoped to be," it spurred him on to gre-ter activities toward that ideal he had ever pefore nim.

Of other writers not here mentioned but the "cost trein smell" he minself has said:

"I have thus played the sedulous ape to Hazlitt, to Lamb, to Fords ort, to Sir Thomas Browne, to Defoe, to Hawthorne, to Hontaigne, to Baudelair, and to Obermann. I remember one of these monkey-tricks, which was called The Vanity of Morals'; it was to have had a second part, 'The Vanity of Enowledge'; out the second part was never attempted, and the first part was written (which is by reason for re-

np. 308

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<sup>5</sup> Life, Vol. I, p. 119



calling it, ghostlike, from its asies) no less than three tiles, first in the oneher of Mazlitt, second in the manner of Ruskin, who had cast or he a passing smell, and third in a laborious pasticcio of Sir Thomas Brown. So with my other works: Cain, an epic, was (save the mark!) an imitation of Sordillo; Robin Hood, a tale in verse, took an eclectic middle course along the fields of Keats, Chauser, and ording in Monmouth, a tragedy, I reclined on the bosom of hr. Cwimburne; in my innumerable gouty-floated lyrics, I followed many masters; in the first draft of The Kingl's Paraon, a tragedy, I was on the trail of no less a man than John Webster; in the second draft of the same piece, with staggering versatility, I haw shifted my allegiance to Congreve, and of course conceived my falls in a less serious voin for it was not Congreve's verse, it was his exquisite prose, that I admired and sought to cony.... So I might go on forever, through all my abortive novels and do not to my later plays, of which I think more tenderly, for they were not only conceived at first under the bracing influence of old Dunas, but have het with resurrections:.. But enough has been said to show by what arts of impermonation and in all trurely wentreloguial efforts I first saw my words on poper."

The stagering versatility of Stevenson's own mind kept nin ever on the clert in tooks, making friends of them all and among all and ever concerning those of "mingled strain and hurtful" he binself says that "they vill be weighed and "in-noved, and only that which suits will be assimilated."

Stevenson to the day of his depth, was a loyal Scot, and had he ever been questioned as to the accident of his birthplace he probably would have suggested that he could not have dictated a more fascinating place for his genius than dinburgh. The town, with its picturesque setting, its history, its legends, its element of romance, contributed naterial ready made to his hand. If a town may be said to have personality, that attribute may be applied to Old Edinourgh around which tenters so much of the romantic history of Cootland. Stevenson felt this charm not only as a loyal Scot should feel the charm of his birthplace, but felt it as only a mind teening with the romantic and pictureque can feel it. It's I genis



and authentic tales alike fascinated him and invited a closer scrutiny of its history. The study of the history of his country absorbed him so completely that for awhile, he fancied himself capable of filling the chair of Scotch History in the University of Edinburgh. A vacancy occurring, he persuaded his friends to present him as a candidate to the Advocates. They complied with his wishes to forth his claims but, to quote Edmund Rosse, "these required nimble treatment, since, to gut it plainly, it was impossible to say he had any". His friends were greatly relieved that his appeal was decided negatively.

The influence of the romantic pest of his country is seen toroughout his entire writings. He lays the scenes of the most important of his works in Edinburgh. He wrote Charles Baxter that; "After all, new countries, sun, music, and all the rest, can never take down our gusty, rainy, smoky, grim old city out of the first place that it has been making for itself in the bottom of my soul". And indeed, there is nothing more withetic about his exile than his great longing and ever increasing love for "Auld Reekie" and the Pentland Mills. Come one has said that there are no more beautiful passages in English prose than those wherein he glorifies Edinburgh.

In this glorification one loss not detect a trace of the provincial. Stevenson had travelled much through countries fully as rich in distorical associations as his own Scotland but Scotland and the beloved Edinburgh reigned subreme. The mystery of London appealed to him and its influence is seen in his takes of the "Suicide Club", "The New Armoian Nights", "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Or. Tyle", "Tarkheim", and a few others. It is to be noted that for mystery and crime he turns to the great capital. There is nothing intimate, the situations are queer and unusual and unreal and the atmosphere is unfamiliar, mysterious. The same aloofness is evident to an even greater degree in the scenes steed in the English provinces. The characters are not characteristic and the descriptions up not appeal to one's farcy. Even Bournemouth viere he lived for three years during a period of ill-health, is not nictured with an atmosphere suggesting reality. He



referred to it:s "the tunchartered wilderness of villas" and discusses it ith to
to
that. Nowhere does he use this health resort, the interesting floating repulation
that he must have met there as literary material. His interest in England and
her population seemed but luke-varm.

France delighted Stevenson. There he always seemed language. The French appealed to him as a marpy, symmathetic reople, more approachable on those things that interested him most. Here his own country men found writers of his own manner of thinking and working. The odu, picturesque, emotional elements of the French pleased him greatly. Paris was an ordless source of masement and gratification. Here he could be the Bohemian and be taken on his own merits without comment - a thing difficult in his own town and in London. He has jim has then of his French experience. The charm of "Fontainelleau" is told in an essa, of that name. He lived as the artists lived and the great forest which rillet describeds as "so calm, with such terrible randour, that I feel mys if really afraid of it", had a particular fescination for his artistic tenternent. Here it too that he studied and immitated the French moets and postry of the fifte n'h century and laid the foundations for his essays on Charles of Orleans and Francis The art center, Barbizon, claimed much of his time and later frez, where it will be remembered, Stevenson first met his life. Greatentribut-a detugle or acters to many of Stevenson's tales. "An Inland Voyage" and "Travels ith a Dorkey" are the results of Stevenson's randerings in the provinces attween his s journs at Grez and Barbizon. The forest mounts gave him the a litude to organize, the natural beauty, the unfottered, unconventional, open-air life, with at as guide, congenial people interested in his alt, and for him a harmin existence than he had known for years.

The greatest influence of all his French experience at the coming in direct contact with the French School of literary critics. They here in sympathy with his independence of traditions in literature, his theory of style, his honest interpretation of life as he saw it. In only one thing did Stevenson hole back. One



problem of sex. Perhaps it was Stevenson's Covenanters' training that hert him alouf arom this. The fact remains that he along tendelously to the cleanly tradition of restraint and self-respect. With the barriers of conventionality down, and with the frank expression of thought and act in these French colonies, it is not to be expected that Stevenson did not receive his full quoth of temptation. That he did honor his ancestral training in purity of act and thought has ever been a source of gratification to all who knew him, either personally or through his works. Through his entire works the problem of sex is not mentioned, his characters meet no temptations they cannot overcome, his ideals never fall to the sordid level. In his world the higher plane of living is emphasized; the lower is acknowledged but the higher triumpas in the end. Perhaps he has given us a bit of his own experience in the verse:

<sup>&</sup>quot;Thick as the stars at night when the moun is down, Pleasures assail him. He to his nobler fato Fares; and but vaves a land as he masses at, Cries but a wayside ord to her at the polder gate, Sings but a logish stare and his face is gone."



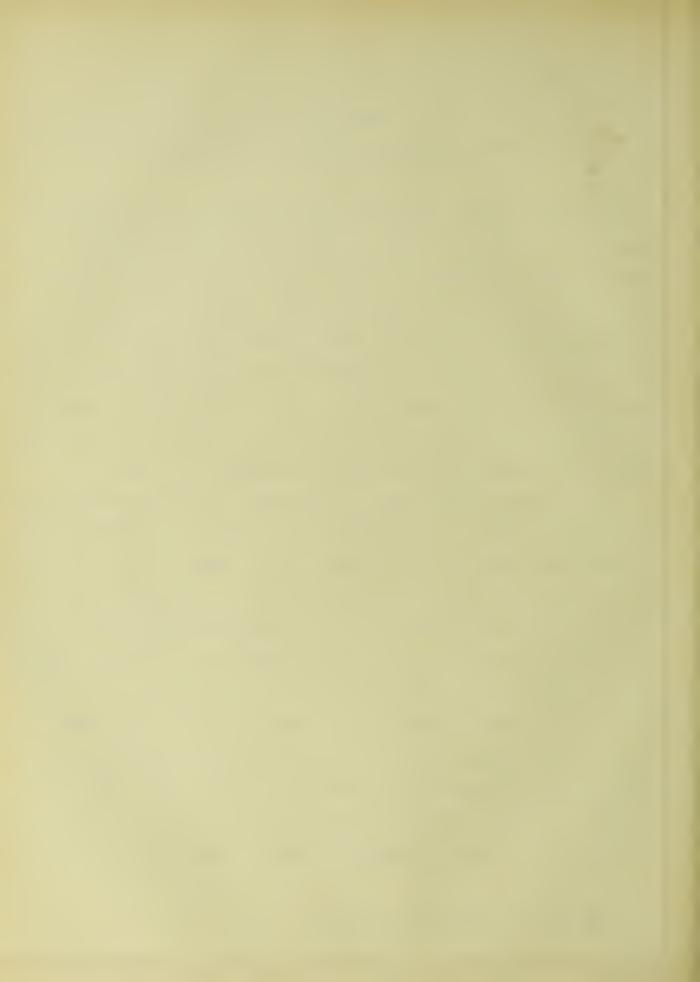
## CHAPTER III

## STEVENSON'S HOTION OF THE FUNCTION OF LITHRATURE

"He founded no school", says Cuiller-Couch," though most of us from time to time have poorly tried to copy him. He remained altogether inimitable, yet never sected conscious of his greatness. It was native in him to rejoice in the successe of other men at least as much as in his own triumphs. One almost felt that so long as good books were written, it was no great concern to him whether he or others whate them. Born with an artist's craving for healty of expression, he achieved that beauty with infinite pairs.... And his books leave the impression that he aid this chiefly from a sense of duty: that he labored and kept the labor alight chiefly because, for the time, other and stronger men id not".

A man's friends are not always his best critics. Friends in may either sharpen or dull the insight. In this instance, one feels that the insight has been sharpened. Quiller-Couch touches a vital spot in Stevenson and his contribution to letters in the reference to his having been "torn with an artist's craving for beauty... achieved with infinite rains". Fost critics must also agree with Stevenson's idea of his "auty" in keeping "the laws alight", but not, however, "chiefly because other and stronger men did not". Stevenson realized his auty, but that duty was also his keenest pleasure in life. Deprived of it he would indeed have been of as little value as many a derelict whose sails have gleaned white for a while or the sea of letters and then faded and been lost to view. But one may fairly say that conscious effort to fulfill his duty was equalled by conscious delight in the doing of it. He speaks of literature as a delightful profession, a

<sup>&</sup>quot;Acventures in Criticism" Cuiller-Couch



primarese bath. "But it is not all primareses, some of it is bramely, and nort of it is upnill". And again he curries out the latter thought with, "One should strain, and then play, strain again, and play again. The strain is for us, it educates; the play is for the reader and pleases. In moments of effort one learns to do the easy things that people like." And it is "to do the easy things that people like." And it is "to do the easy things that people like" that Stevenson considers as the greatest function Literature can perform. Nost diligently he unges all who will listen to remember that the end of all art is to please, and that that end is not easily trained.

We have the history of his own efforts toward technical success. It begins with the school boy with an English classic in one pocket and a percil and rad in the other trying to reproduce the style of his model and, when the task was lone, finding another model to copy. He played the "sedulous are" to those authors who pleased him that he, in turn, might please others - and minutelf. This training does not end with the school boy but is painstakingly carried on through those years when he taught minuself his inimitable style, and then on down through the years while he continued teaching himself. He never felt that his task was completed. He never risked the temptation to rest on his laurels. He believed that with style, as with everything else in life worth striving for, the best was yet to be. The attainment of that"best" could only be by continuous effort, untiring patience, unlimited zeal.

"No art", thus he disagrees with Herry James, "does connete with life. Man's one method, whether he reasons or creates, is to half shut his eyes against the dazale are confusion of reality....Literature, above all in its most tyrical mood of narrative, flees the direct challenge and pursues instead an independent and creative aim. So far as it imitates at all, it imitates not like but speech: not the facts of human destiny, but the emmasis and the surpressions with which the number actor tells of them.... Our art is occupied, and bound to be occupied,

Nemories and Portraits, pp.348



not so much in making stones true as in making them typical; not so much in capturing the lineaments of each fact, as in marshalling all of them towards a common end",

In this and similar quotations, Stevenson defines his theory of fiction. In this quotation one finds also a note of discord against the current realism valied he refers to as a "mere whim of veering fashion". There is a wide difference, he avers, between the artist and the artisan. The "artist" finds it easier to mass his details about his message. The artisan must, from his misty concertion of detail eliminate the useless, accentuate the important, brune, trim, and graft until leaf, twig and branch are distinct parts of the tree he has planted. This, he says, is executive art and can only be controlled by intellectual courage. The indolent artist, satisfied with his style and to curry "popular favour and attract the moop, adds a steady current of what I may be allowed to call the rancid"!

This addission of realistic detail was inaugurated by Coutt, added unto by Balzac, Zola, Henry James, Daudot "balbling of audille colours and visitle scurus", and all their satellites and finally has led to the works that now amaze us on a railway journey". Stevenson argues only that this is add art, that it is slipsond, which is a thing he cannot forgive. He cannot excuse fault, respective, the grandiloculant, sentimentality, or any of the vulgar charms that go to make up the railway-journey literature. Detail, he assures us, is the father of all these rhetorical sins, and a writer's most constant prayer should be to be delivered from this temptation. He himself was delivered by his own tireless efforts and a curious, carmy instinct of saying in the briefest possible manner and with the very best choice of words the exact thing he meant to say and to give the vivid impression he meant to leave. Take, for example, a bit from his letters describing the leper settlement at Molokai.

1 "Presently we can employed the leger promotory

letters, Vol. II, pp. 183, 189.



lowland, cuite bare and bleak and norsh, a little town of wooder nouses, two churches, a landing-stair, all unsightly, sour, northerly, lying charact the sunrise, with the great wall of the pali cutting the world out on the south...."

"I have seen sights that cannot be told, and heard stories that cannot or respected; yet I never addred by poor race so much, nor (strange as it may seem) loved life more than in the settlement. A horror of moral beauty cross over the place: that's like bad Victor Hugo, but it is the only way I can extrest the sense that lived with me all these days... The place as regards scenery is grand, gloony, and bleak. Fighty mountain walls descending sheer along the ruble face of the island into a sea unusually deep; the front of the mountain west to west, the clinging forest, one viriaescent cliff: about half-way from east to west, the low, bare, stony promontory edged in between the cliff and the ocean; the two little townsecated on either side of it, as bare almost as inting recrimes upon a beach; and the population - gorgons and chimaeras dire."

In these two descriptions of the Island, Etevenson heart to present an artistically unpleasant picture, to make the reader feel the "norror of horal beauty production." His success stands unenallerged. Each adjective, "presigntly", "sour", "northerly", and the phrases "lying athwart the sunrise", lying "as pare almost as bothing machines upon a beach", present some definite, unpleasant picture or impression. Other visitors have described this particular place and we turn from the realistic detail with loatning. Stevenson invites our rity and our sympathy and we grieve with him over the sad lot of these unfortunate outcasts. Finally, it is dignified, which is an infinitely harder task to accomplish in depicting the norrifying and pathetic than in describing that which is to please.

It seemed a deliberate resolution on Stevenson's part that his readers should look first to his manner of telling and second to the letter he tells of. The story should be subordinate to the idea and the art should triumph. Not only did he consider the here effect of paragraph, but that of a sentence, or even a single word, testing it as a swordshar tests his steel, that the artistic effect he sought



should triumph. We tells us that "The artistic result of a romance, what is left upon the mamory by any really powerful and artistic novel, is something so contilicated and refined that it is difficult to put a name to it and yet something as simple as nature.... Art is working far ahead of language as vell as of science, realizing for us, by all manner of suggestions and exaggerations, effects for vaich we have as yet no lirect name; .....for which we may never have a direct name, for the reason that these effects do not enter very largely into the necessities of life."

Art does not work for abead of language in such a tale. We finds to use in his ideals of fiction for the novel with a purpose save, perhaps, as a model of incompetence. Art is lost sight of in "the noral, clumsily forced into every tole and corner of the story or thrown externally over it like a carret." Most than a score of years has passed since Stevenson gave utterance to this criticism of the novel with a purpose. One wonders what he might be saying today could be cut criticize a list of the modern "best sellers". The twenty years has gained so little in wheat and so much in chaff that Stevenson's sense of artistic fitness in fiction yould, it is safe to assume, be outraged at the apparent experness and rapidity with which the ever gullable reading uplic consumes the problem novels of today.

Had Stevenson said that the end of all art was to give superficial obusinent rather than genuine pleasure, then he would have rejoiced in browsing with the novel readers in the Elysian fields of present day fiction. Never, in the history of fiction has there been such an over-stocked harket when everybody writes and everybody reads, and everybody waits impatiently for the next best seller, where on an over-crowded stage the nore or less vulgar realities of life are maraded before the gaping public, maked, undignified, and without reserve. There are truths in

Familiar Studies of Wer and Books, np. 25-26



these thies, no doubt, and illuminating moral "hilosophy; permans there may be note that do not, one way or another, justify their existence, and Stevenson could and would are given credit where credit was due. He had no quarrel with the fundamental truths of any bit of fiction, but quarrel he did and would with the technical method. Enrely his sorrow would have been great over what is covered by the titles that glare at us from the average bookstalls of today. Then "Dick Hellar" in Hipling's "Light that Failed" found that the public eye was displaced with its printed soldier, raged, wear, undempt - fairly breathing the sortid nor or the cattle field, "Tellar" dressed his soldier in her raiment, with sharer cain and positioned sword, with pleasing background and joyous outlook and - sold his picture. Stevenson would have rejoiced in dying a namer rather that there a single tall, a pergraph even into the glinsy, shoday, timed, realistic, pot-boiling "Lest-seller" destined to assee. To have due so muld have been to fall under his own bitter condemnation of others whom he denounced as creators of "a slovenly, hose, untrue, and empty literature".

To create literature with an eye single only to the livelihood to be gained therefrom Stevenson considered as bad morality. It was a "penny-wise and virtue-foolish" spirit which degraded, demeaned and so cheapened the Maje malling of letters in his syes that it amounted to a literary crime. In this classes that it amounted to a literary crime. In this classes the highest closer but because of the spirit in which his veresare updated. "There are two makes inconvent upon any near who enters or the business of ariting: truth to the fact and a good which in the treatment." Will the modern journalist head this? Will be acknowledge "....the last word: in all no ration there is only one to, "to clover, and that is to be exact"? Stevenson file, as indeed all thinking rapple feel, that the journalist has a distinct service to merform - that of unrealisting injustices, defending the trath and pointing the way to progress. To the journalist, as we know or think of himself things are both landed and expedient that maits his purpose of the hour. Parlars the embagation of their literary immorality is



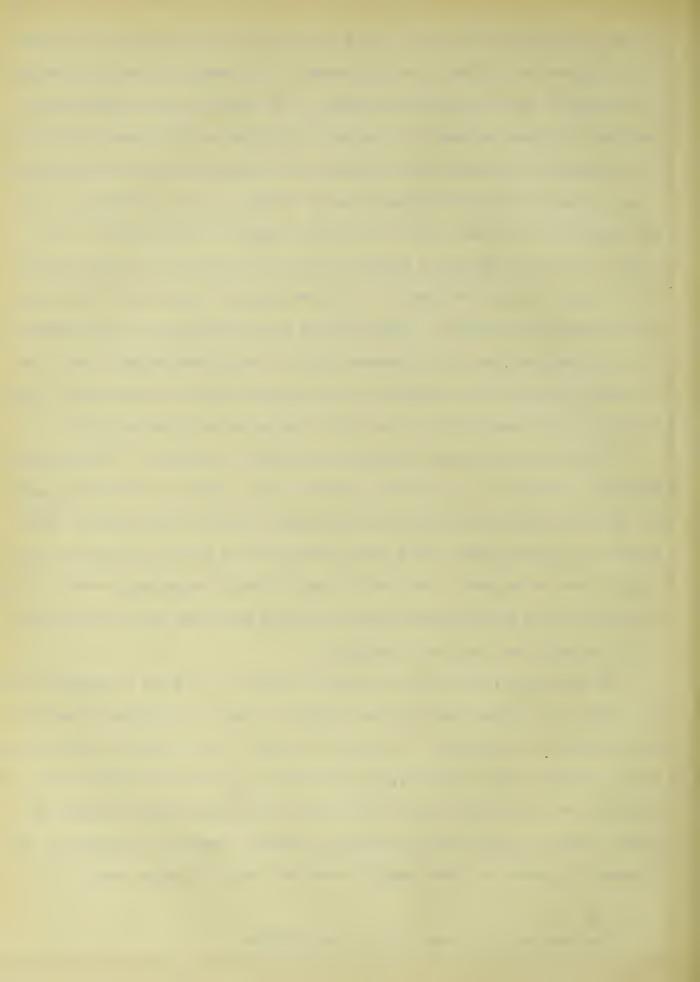
due to the established fact that they are building neither for time nor eternity. Their edifices are erected to suit the needs of the immediate time, to be wrecked or improved as an everchanging age demands. One finds all too few great men in the long list whose business it is to keep us informed on the things of this world. Of the many that have been called few have been chosen for fame from the pyrotechnical successes that enable newspaper men to advance in their profession. It is not required of them that they be intellectual beyond a certain limit. It is amazing how little education a journalist may have and achieve a certain success. To Stevenson this was inexcusable. He grieved that the common people who secure their knowledge and habits of thought largely from the newspapers, should have to rely upon such unlettered and untutored minds for their intellectual food. He would have rejoiced at the endeavors of the present schools of journalism in their efforts to train educated men in the art of journalism and newspaper craft.

"The first duty of every man who is to write", he tells us, "is intellectual.

Designedly or not, he has so far set himself up for a leader of the minds of men; and he must see that his own mind is kept supple, charitable, and bright. Everything but prejudice should find a voice through him; he should see the good in all things; where he has even a fear that he does not wholly understand, there he should be wholly silent; and he should recognize from the first that he has only one tool in his workshop, and that tool is sympathy.

The second duty, far harder to define, is moral. There are a thousand different humours in the mind, and about each of them, when it is uppermost, some literature tends to be deposited. Is this to be allowed? Not certainly in every case, and yet perhaps in more than rigorists would fancy. It were to be desired that all literary work, and chiefly works of art, issued from sound, human, healthy, and potent impulses, whether grave or laughing, humorous, romantic, or religious. Yet it cannot be denied that some valuable books are partially insane; some, mostly

Sketches and Criticisms, Vol. 22, pp. 283-284.



religious, partially inhuman; and very many tainted with morbidity and impotence.

We are not, above all, to look for faults, but merits.... Man is imperfect: yet,
in his literature, he must express himself and his own views and preferences; for
to do anything else is to do a far more perilous thing than to risk being immoral:
it is to be sure of being untrue.... In literature as in conduct, you can never
hope to do exactly right. All you can do is to make as sure as possible; and for
that there is but one rule. Nothing should be done in a murry that can be done
slowly.....the delay must precede any beginning; and if you meditate a work of
art, you should first long roll the subject under the tongue to make sure you like
the flavour, before you brew a volume that shall taste of it from end to end: or
if you propose to enter on the field of controversy, you should first have thought
upon the question under all conditions, in health as well as in sickness, in sorrow
as well as in joy. It is this nearness of examination necessary for any true and
kind writing, that makes the practice of the art a prolonged and noble education
for the writer."

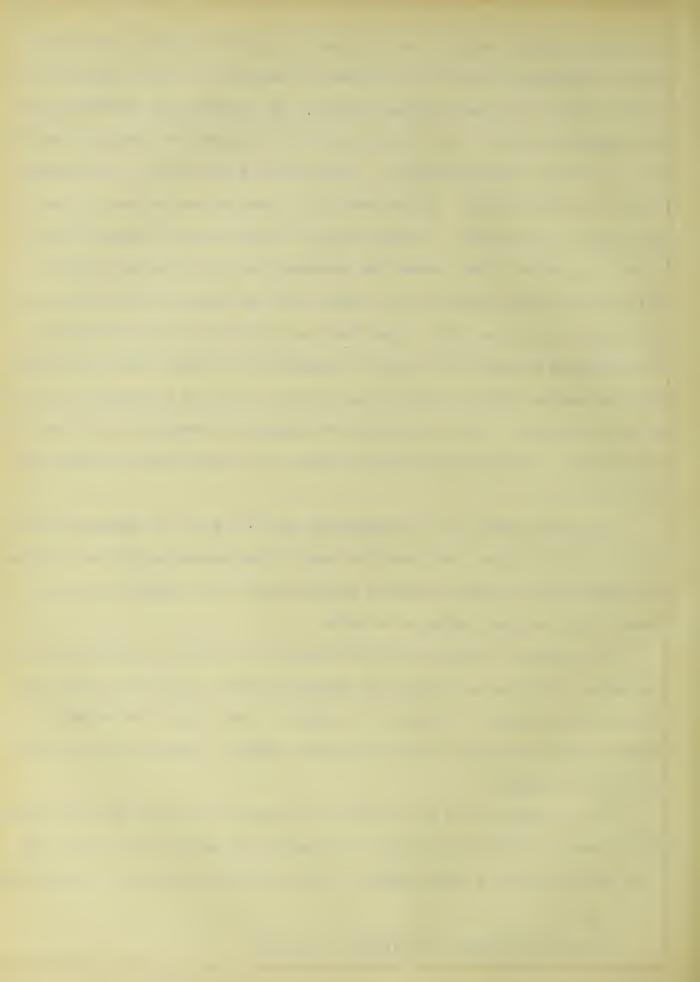
The average author of the sentimentally realistic tale, the problem novelist, the pot-boiler narrator, the journalist, should stand abashed before this vigorous defining of that for which literature should stand. "It is a work", he says, "worth doing, and worth trying to do well."

In his manner of telling as how "to please" he is neither dictatorial nor discouraging. He tells us gallantly and sympathetically the path that must be traversed before the goal is reached. He urges us to be diligent and patient no matter what the odds may be against the final triumph. Speaking out of his own experience he argues:

"It is better to live and be done with it, than to die daily in the sickroom.

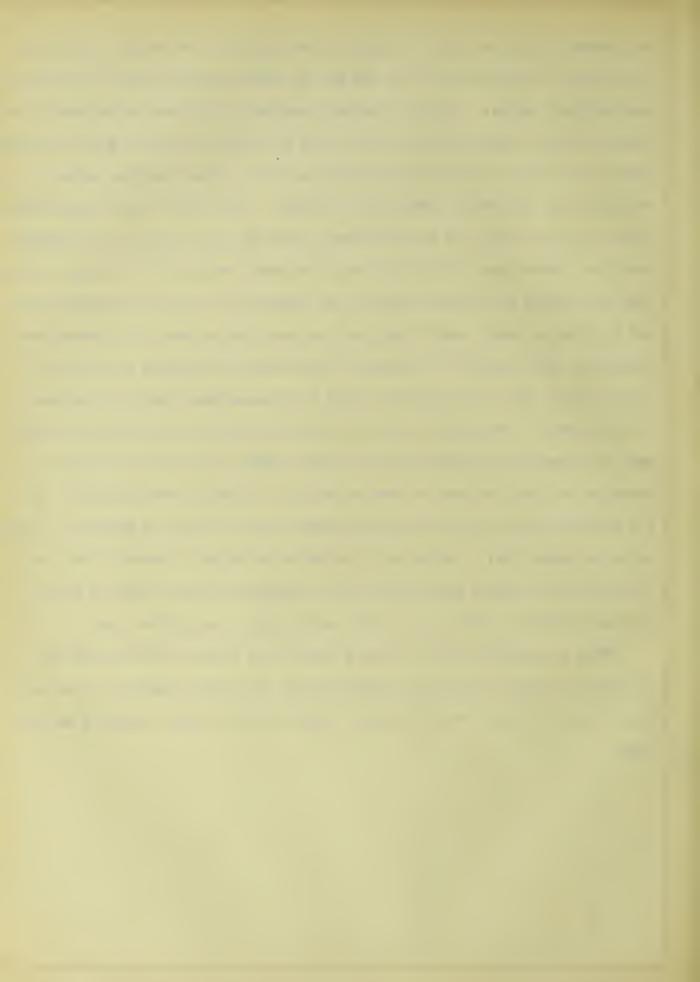
By all means begin your folio; even if the doctor does not give you a year, even if he hesitates about a month, make one brave push and see what can be accomplished

Virginibus Puerisque. "Aes Triplex", pp. 105



It is not only in finished undertakings that we ought to honor usein a week. ful labor. A spirit goes out of the man who means execution, which outlives the most untimely ending. All who have meant good work with their whole hearts, have done good work, although they may die before they have the time to sign it. Every heart that has beat strong and cheerfully has left a hopeful impulse behind it in the world, and bettered the tradition of mankind. And even if death catch people, like an open pit fall, and in mid-career, laying out vast projects, and planning monstrous foundations, flushed with hope, and their months full of boastful language, they should be at once tripped up and silenced: is there not something brave and spirited in such a termination? and does not life go down witha better grace, foaming in full body over a precipice, than miserably struggling to an end in sandy deltas? When the Greeks made their fine saying that those whom the gods love die young, I cannot help believing they had this sort of death also in their eye. For surely, at whatever age it overtake theman, this is to die young. Death has not been suffered to take so much as an illusion from his heart. In the hot-fit of life, a-tip-toe on the highest point of being, he passes at a bound on to the other side. The noise of the mallet and chisel is scarcely quenched, the trumpets are hardly done blowing, when, trailing with him clouds of glory, this happy-starred, full-blooded spirit shoots into the spiritual lad."

There is a martial note in this, a call to the colors. If we accept the challenge, we must look upon the realization of the ideal it implies as the one thing in life for which we are willing to sacrifice all else so that Art may triumph.



## CHAPTER IV

## THE TYPES OF LITERATURE HE PRODUCED

It was impossible to guess what topic Stevenson might discuss in his next book

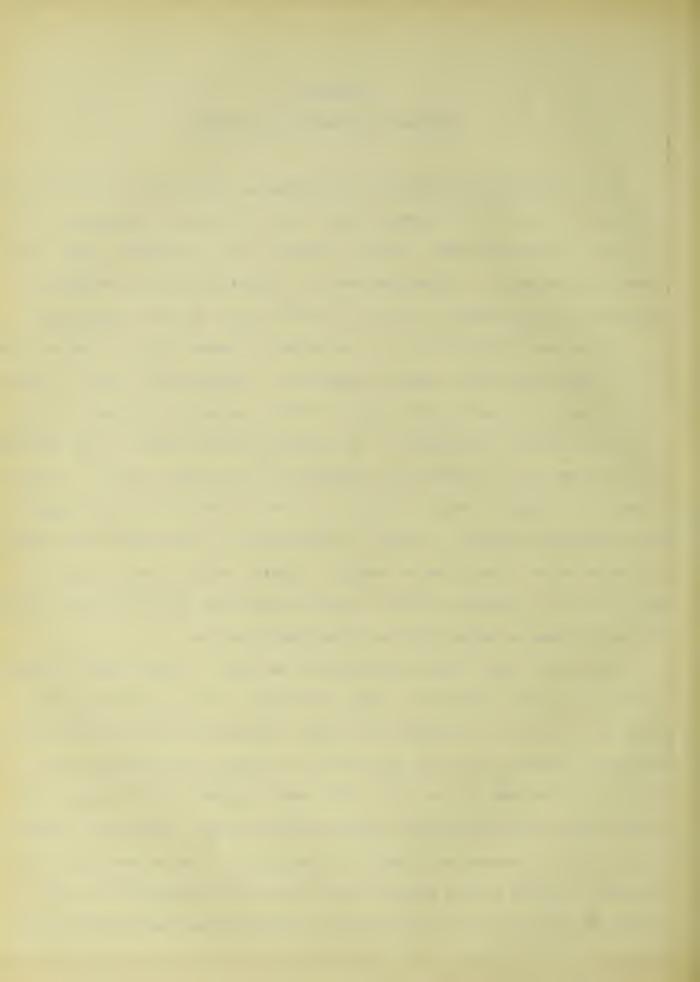
It might be a collection of nursery rhymes, a bit of history, or biography, a fan
ciful tale of the South Seas, a ballad, a romance of early Scotland, a comparison

between age and youth. One wonders what his "staggering versitility" might not

have given us had the years of his life stretched beyond the half century mark.

In this age of specialists it is but natural to assume that, if a man does one type of thing well, others suffer by comparison. Stevenson lived before the high noon of specialists and the whole field of fiction was his battle ground, and the whole field became his possession. His successes are more marked in some quarters than in others, but in nothing that he undertook is he counted a failure. One is tempted to wish that he had not tried to be a poet, but even here he has given us some things that the world is richer for having had, and through which the man and his genius shine. Only a man of Stevenson's genius could take on the color of such diversified interests and still keep his personality, which is evident throughout his writings, no matter what the subject matter may be.

Some one has aptly said of Stevenson that he builds not, but pitches his tent, lights his fire and invites you to enjoy it with him. And the invitation astonishes us a bit, for it is couched in the exact phraseology that we would have used had we the literary ability and had we come to look upon the subject under discussion from the same point of view. This subtle flattery is particularly true of his Essays upon which, perhaps, his final fame must rest. They are a delightfully intimate discussion of friend with friend and the thing he loved best to do. There was a certain selfish pleasure derived from giving expression to his own views. He asked only for an audience that he might entertain them from the rich



store house of his mind.

Many of Stevenson's most characteristic essays are the work of his youth.

The larger portion of them were written before he was thirty-five. "Virginibus Pueresque", published in his thirty-second year, has been criticized as a book of "middle-aged inexperience"; that it is "Sanguine, gentle, musical, in the deepest sense unoriginal.... Surely it is because a half-truth, a truth that may be gobbled up in a phrase and remembered only as a phrase, is easier to accept than a whole truth, upon which the reader must engage his attention? It must be the trope that lures readers of Virginibus Pueresque into acceptance of thought so threadbare and ill-nourished..... Only its phrases remain for quotation, for use in calendars, common thoughts turned into remembrances and mottoes ready for the rubricator..... There is no philosophic optimism in Stevenson's essays: there is sometimes high spirits, and sometimes there is a cheerful saying; but at heart the 'teaching' of these things is as prosaic as is the instruction of any lay preacher"

These "immature judgments" and "phrases for the boudoir", this critic assures us, do not break from the full heart. They are merely to adorn a tale and point a moral. It is much better to say bluntly, says the critic, that, "Its nice to have something to look forward to", than, "It is better to travel hopefully than to arrive, and the true success is to labour". Sugar-coating virtues is, the critic informs us, an immoral and ill-judged proceeding and no self respecting author should stoop to such a culpable act. "They grow tedious, like the grimaces of a spoilt child; and we no longer respond to that spurious galvanism which of old we mistook for a thrill of nature".

Other critics have accused Stevenson of lacking weight in human experience because in his moral essays he is so wholesomely free from didactic comment and prudery; because he touches so lightly on life's deeper problems and because his philosophy of life is so manly and same and simple. They have called him a "happy,

Robert Louis Stevenson, A Critical Study , by Frank Swimmerton, pp.73; 74.



heartless pagan, working always face to face with Death, and the dominant note always one of cheer and comaraderie". We should like to ask these censors if their human experiences can compare with his in depth of feeling, or sympathy, or suffering, or the courageous flouting of temptations? Heartless pagan? Because, perhaps he conceived his God to be a God of joy, and peace, and happiness, and sympathetic consideration, and his duty to be the dispenser of such. It is because he knew life so intimately, had walked hand in hand with sorrow, and grief, and despair, poverty and the grim specter of Death itself unafraid, that he chose rather, to throw upon the screen of life only those pictures that would cheer the heart and make all who mourn to rejoice.

Our critic continues suggesting that: "Cultivation of the picturesque, fondness for phrase, is inevitably productive of falseness; it is a literary gesture, a cultivable habit, such as the habit of any vain person who flickers his hands or persistently turns the 'better side' of his face or character to the beholder. The first instinctive vanity develops rapidly into a pose, and pose can never be much more than amusing." We enter a humble protest to these criticisms. We have read the moral essays again after reading the denunciation of them but we cannot convince ourselves that his message to us is a hollow, flippant, picturesque pose. We find, rather, the triumphant note of the man who has lived and has overcome.

Stevenson's group of essays on specifically literary subjects shows the wide range of his reading and the men who influenced him. He was not, he says of himself, a literary critic. These essays, aside from giving his own personal impressions of themen and their works of whom he writes, are not ranked especially important among critical essays. Stevenson's mind was essentially inventive and the essays, lack in the constructive element that makes the critical essay valuable. They are useful to the students of Stevenson, more than to anyone else, for the glimpse they give of the men who helped him form his habits of thought and style

ibid pp.76



and his broad outlook on all things.

The miscellaneous Essays discuss many different things. He may talk of sentiment, or mental experiences, or how to talk and how to listen, of some picturesque pastoral scene, or espouse the cause of a native government against Christian interference, or condemm in words that fairly seethe with indignation the criticism of a priests unappreciated work in a life of voluntary exile among a doomed people. All of his qualities seem to coalesce when he talks of his own life in some of the essays in this group. He liked to talk about himself and there is a certain frank, boyish egotism that is irresistable to the reader. One feels the personal charm and puts down the essays with a smile at having had a delightful hour with a pleasing friend.

Someone has said that Stevenson died with a thousand stories in his heart.

His life was a huge volume, each day a page and each page a tale. The gipsy life he lived taught him to seek

".....books in running brooks,
Sermons in stones and good in everything".

He stored away in his mind the stories they suggested to be used when the inspiration came. He was at his best in the short story. He could see in a flash the complete story hinging upon a single incident. His confidence never wavered in the writing of it as it often did in the writing of a novel. These short stories represent as successfully as any other group of his writings the variety and brilliance of his talent. They are variously grouped as to excellence by various critics but that one which is best known and which brought him at once into the lime light is "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." This remarkable story was the result of a dream of Stevenson - a "bogey tale," for which his "Brownies of the Brain" seem to have dictated the entire plot. The dream made such a profound impression upon him that within a week he had written and re-written it until the outstanding details satisfied him, and he set to work perfecting the whole.



The plot deals with the dual nature of man, a subject which had occupied Stevenson's mind for months. He had, with characteristic thoroughness, looked at the problem from every point of view and questioned it in every way. The answer to it all, that is, the medium through which he hoped to gain public favor on the matter, came strangely enough in a dream. Stevenson's reproduction of that dream is a remarkable allegory so blending art and ethics as to make it as near perfect as a work of its kind can be. Joseph Jacob says of it:

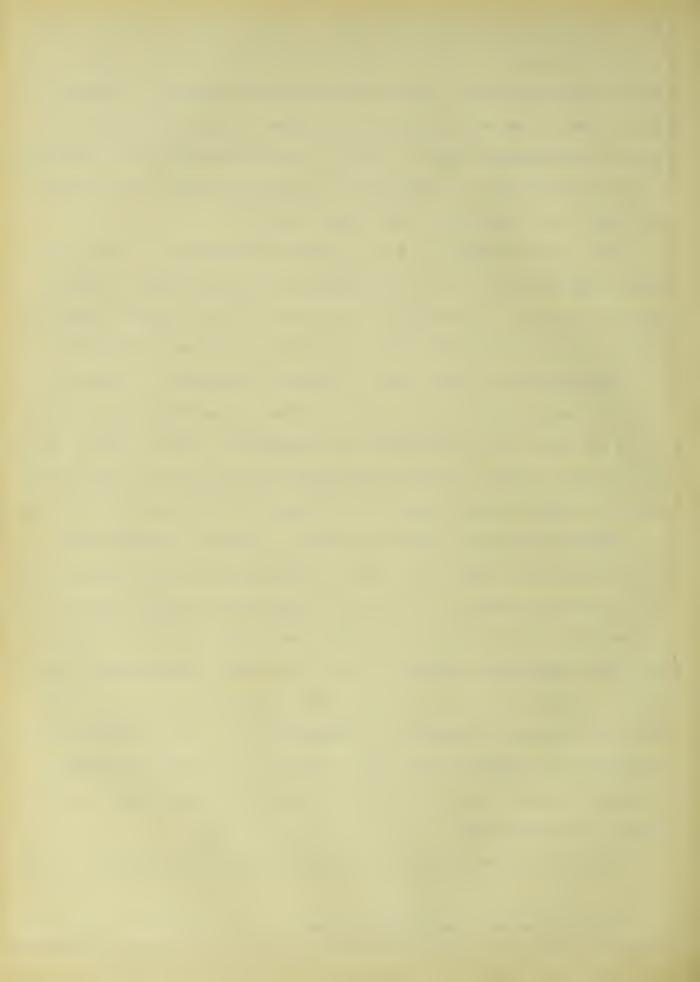
"Its artistic economy is almost perfect; every word tells. In the background looms one aspect of the great problem of sex which Stevenson elsewhere
evaded or avoided. But the facing of the facts of life is straight forward and
sincere. Mr. Hyde is as much part of the composite nature as is Dr. Jekyll".

Throughout the story one is never conscious of back-ground. There is incident-telling, forceful incident; there is action predominating over the reason for it and there is the very essence of the phenomenon. There is horror, frankly, almost rudely, depicted. Nothing that Stevenson ever wrote has received the attention of pulpit and press alike as "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde".

"Markheim" needs but a little more to make it rank as a companion piece to
"The Strange Case." "The Suicide Club", and "The Bottle Imp", are above the average of Stevenson's stories. So successfully had Stevenson caught the spirit of the supernatural in "The Bottle Imp" that when it was given to the Samoan people in their own language, they believed it to be a part of their own supernatural workings. And that vivid bit of local color, "The Beach of Falesa" is one of the most perfect pieces of narrative from Stevenson's pen. It is a realistic tale of incident that is exceedingly well told. "The Isle of Voices", has no plot, no problem, no object. It is a beautiful fairy tale that almost sings the perfect rhythm of its construction.

One might go on down through the list of Stevenson's short stories to verify

<sup>1 &</sup>quot;Literary Studies" Joseph Jacob, pp. 180



the claim of variety and brilliance of his talent. There are tales of the supernatural, psychological tales, romantic tales of incident, light comedies, all blending Stevenson's art and craft so successfully as to make them each reflect the light of his Genius.

Of Stevenson's novels and romances, one instinctively thinks first of "Treasure Island". It is hard not to overestimate the value of this tale. Unlike most stories for the young, it fascinates the mature mind as well as the adventure loving youth. It is possible to read and reread the tale without wearying of it. It is natural and jolly and so full of incident that the interest never flags. From the time we meet wicked old Pew with his tapping stick, Long John with his ham-like face, the voyage in the Hispaniola and all its incidents, to the Treasure Island itself with its mysteries and horrors, there is a breathless interest closing only when Jim is roused in his after dreams "with the sharp voice of Captain Flint still ringing in my ears: 'Pieces of eight! Pieces of eight!'" The serene simplicity of style makes it a literary classic. To the casual reader there is no evidence of the struggle to get everything in its place in the proper rhetorical manner. There is no outward evidence that two men and a boy, and that boy the one for whom the story was written - pored over the details of the sea chest so that nothing might escape their careful consideration. To the minutest detail "Treasure Island" is a success, even to the atmosphere of blasphemy created without the use of one blasphemous word. It is all action from first to last and all the characters are heroes.

"Kidnapped", with its sequel "Catriona", is next in line in the historical novels. "Kidnapped" shows the same wonderful inventive genius as "Treasure Island," and the adventure is as exciting, as vivid and as picturesque. It is also a tale to read and re-read. Good as it is, however, it has not the same intensity as "Treasure Island", and is not, of course, a tale complete in itself. It is not often that an author makes as great a success of a sequel as of the original.



There is obvious effort and artificiality in "Catriona" when compared with "Kid-napped". It is most entertaining and quite worthy the effort judged singly, but it is not equal to Kidnapped.

"The Master of Ballantrae" is, by far, the best of the romances. There is less organic connection in the incidents of this tale than in the stories previously discussed, and the break in the story in the middle is a serious defect. But there are some wonderfully fine scenes that make the book remarkable and one to be re-read.

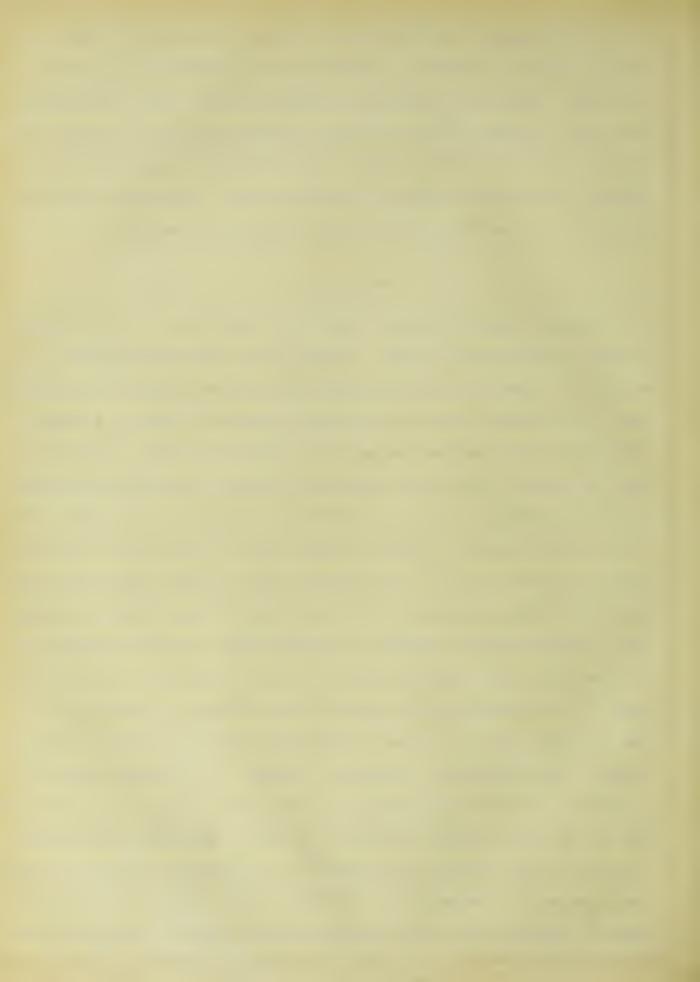
In all the romances one is constantly reminded of Stevenson's suggestion that the difficulty of writing novels was the length - "it kills". He had not the physical endurance to carry his conception through on a single plane as in the short story. There are breaks and the senses are jarred, and we turn the leaf for the lurs of the next incident. In the picturesque tales he achieves a greater success, for in them he sees ever before him the effect he wishes to produce. If he is certain of his effect the story is moulded to fit it; if he sees the end of the adventure there is no question as to the success of the tale. But in the romances, except for "The Master" we are only entertained and not deeply moved. The conception is not always uniformly carried through, and the interest is not successfully as sustained in the characters and incidents as one should expect in successful romances. Had he finished "Wier of Hermiston", which fragment stands alone among the tales for its excellence, it is safe to assume that this book would have given him even greater fame for its own sake. He seemed in this story to have reached the ideal heights of sustained success from the first page to the last fragment of a sentence.

It becomes at once evident in the stories which Stevenson wrote assisted by Lloyd Osbourne that he could not do justice to himself while writing in conjunction with another. However good or bad critics may consider "The Wrecker", "The Wrong Box", and "The Ebb Tide" from the Stevensonian point of view, it should be remembered that they do not form a part of Stevenson's individual possessions.



Considered independently from Stevenson's former successes, they have their own merits. We see the Stevenson touch here and there, and where we miss it, we criticize. They are not without their faults, but on the whole they are good works; and if we cannot say that Stevenson has added materially to his own successes, we should at least pay tribute to the success that Lloyd Osbourne has achieved, and not denounce them as "un-Stevensonian". They stand as they were probably meant to be considered - as much one author's as the other.

Stevenson's vagabond instincts never quite deserted him. In his early days of travel he preferred to go alone. Various bits of travel fragments left to us describe his impressions of these solitary tramps and the enjoyment they afforded him. The first travel book to be published, however, the record of a canoeing trip with a friend. "An Inland Voyage" is the record of the daily happenings of these two friends in all sorts of weather and through all sorts of circumstances. It is autobiographical in its way and there is an interesting and charming bit of his personality revealed in almost every page, and an introduction to the personality of the friend with him. The trip was full of incident; there was a dangerous accident with a fallen tree in the swollen Oise and once Stevenson was arrested. Lodgings could not always be had and the weather was not always desirable for cance trips. But these things are all treated with a light hand in a cheery manner. His observations along the way are not so clear nor entertaining as in that delightful trip he took alone in the Cevennes of which we have the record in "Travels" where he moralizes every step of the way. Not a character appears on his horizon that is not ethically valued in the scheme of life. In the "Travels" also the one feels that there are three in the party - Stevenson, Modestine and the reader, sharing together the incidents of the journey and enjoying each others company perfectly. Few people can read "Travels with a Donkey" without an answering thrill and the feeling that the journey had been taken in reality rather than



between the covers of the book. Though alone except for the endearing Modestine,

Stevenson seems never lonely as he does in his next two travel tales, "The Amateur

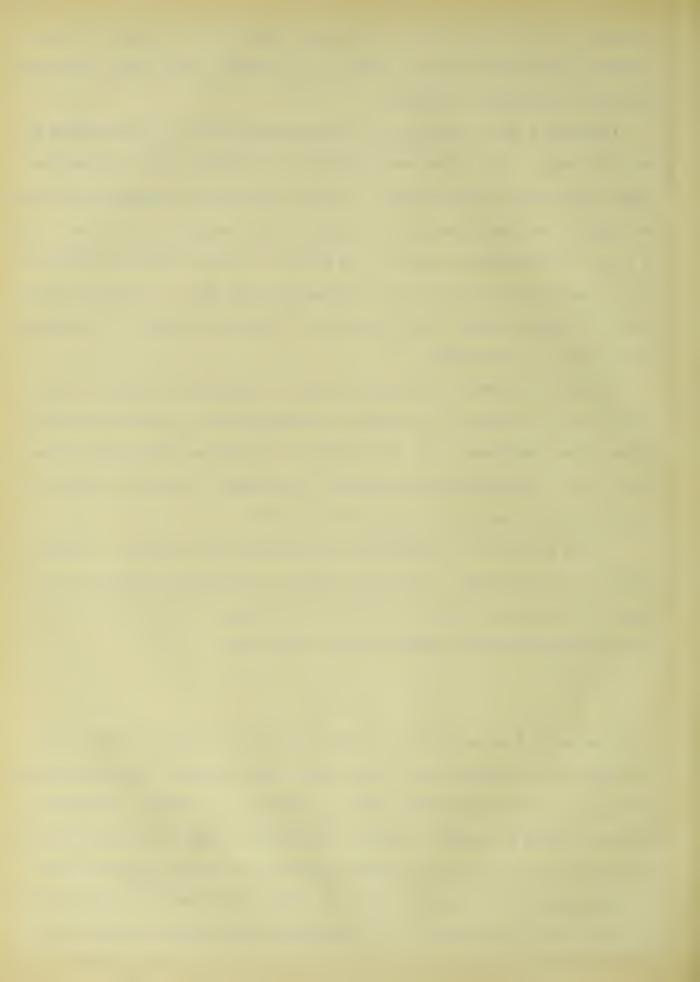
Emmigrant" and "Across the Plains".

Stevenson's trip to America had a significance to him that was destined to make him lonely. His outlook was affected by his voluntary exile and the temporary estrangement from his people. Neither "The Amateur Emmigrant," nor "Across the Plains", have the force and entertainment of his earlier travel books. There is a lack of spontaneity, of grip on the situation and the "wayside silhouettes", while conscientiously drawn, have no imagination about them. Stevenson suffered greatly by the discomforts of his lonely travelling and the result is not pleasing in the record of this journey.

"Silverado Squatters" is an unpretentious but delightful account of a trip to and life in a deserted mining camp to recuperate after a serious breakdown in health. The loveliness of his surroundings, the remoteness from civilization, Nature in all her various moods appealed to him strongly in this book and he succeeds admirably in making them appeal to the reader.

"In the South Seas" is Stevenson's most genuine book of travel. We find little of the picturesque. It does not charm with the charm of "Travels with a Donkey" but it gives us a faithful picture of his odyssy in the South Seas and marks the beginning of the happiest period of his life.

Stevenson's interest in the drama was great but his dramatic efforts seem, in a way, not to belong to him. We have noted that the same is true in connection with the stories written together with Lloyd Osbourne. Considered independent of Mr. Henley, there is the same criticism to be passed - they are not Stevenson; and they are less so than the novels because Stevenson did not take them seriously. We cannot prophecy what would have been the result had he bent his best efforts on the plays but we do know that he fully realized the importance of dramatic action

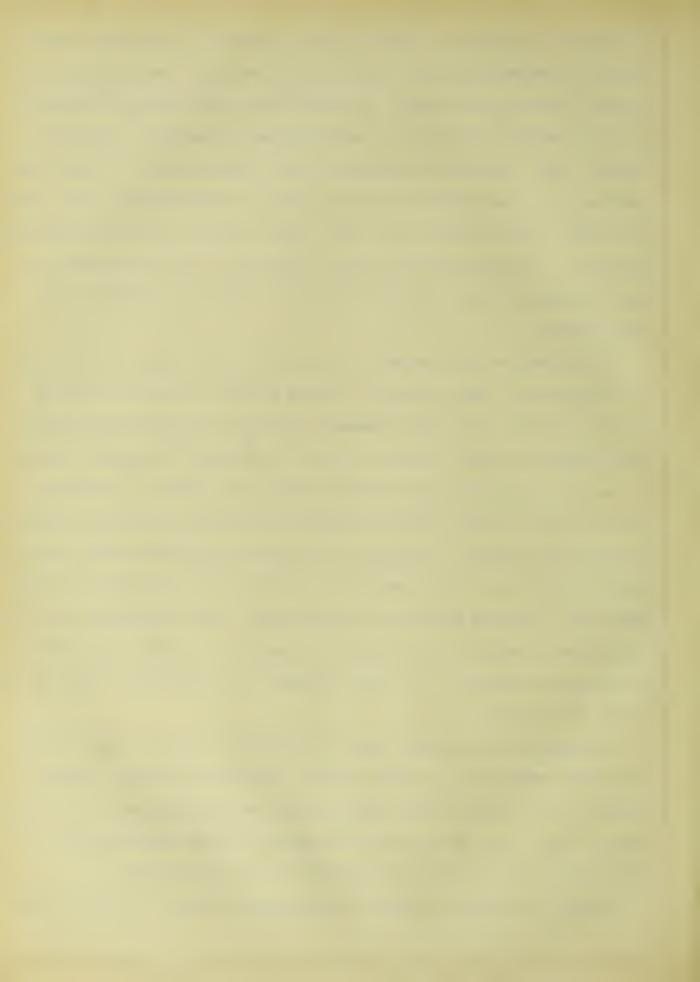


in the world of fiction. He argued that no bit of fiction that could not stand the test of drematization was a success, and his own stories were subjected to a critical analysis in this respect. He tells us that his "Brownies of the Brain" gave him "fine bogey tales" that he meant sometime to dramatize. It may have been his lack of confidence in himself or inertia that prevented the public from receiving any of the "Brownie" inspiration except in a few instances. "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" was not a drama but it was a bogey tale and it has been successfully dramatized. This same theme of the dual personality of man is the thread upon which Stevenson and Henley strung the incidents in their most successful play, "Deacon Brodie".

In this play we find Stevenson giving free rein to his fancy and the result is not unpleasing. Deacon Brodie is an active citizen by day and -- an active burglar by night. On the whole incident and speech are distinctive and typical of his thought, and there is quite a fine air of adventure and desperate efforts. The play occupies something less than three days and the action is natural and correct in form. There is enough business and worldliness and romance introduced to keep up the interest. But there is a little too much smugness about the "goodness" of the Deacon and the "badness" of the robber to be a success to the theater going world. A reading public appreciates the style - the fine language, the fine distinctions in character drawing, and the fineness of the subtle suggestions. We see Stevenson's hand here. It is the chiselling of the artist where should be the cutting of the artisan.

"Beau Austin" was much more adapted to Stevenson's artistic temperament but, for the same reason, it also failed to find an appreciative public. What the theatrical world demanded at the time these plays were produced was not in Stevensons art to give - bold strokes, forcible language, crude characterization, outspoken facts, a bald realistic interpretation of the facts of life.

It may be a bit unjust to speak of the dramas as failures. They were acted

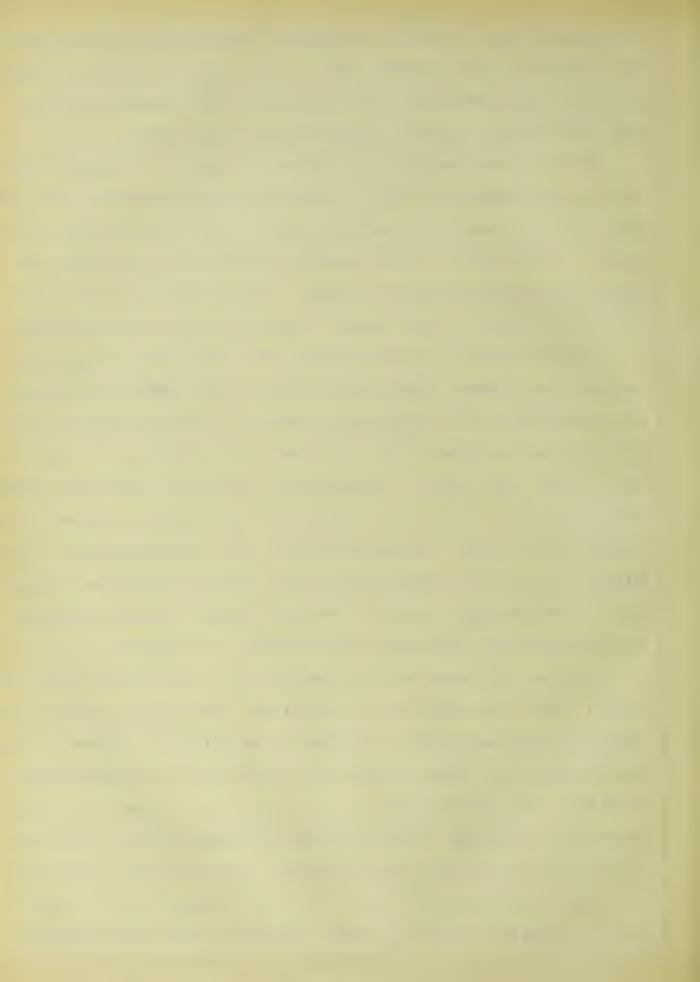


with varying success in London and Montreal but they were not popular and Stevenson almost at once lost interest in them. Their reception by the public shattered
his faith in them completely and had they not been as much Henley's as his own,
they would doubtless have been withdrawn from the dramatic world.

Of the two remaining plays brief mention may be made. Of "Macaire" Stevenson has said, "Macaire is a piece of job-work, hurriedly bockled; might have been worse, might have been better; happy-go-lucky; act-it-or-let-it-rot piece of business." We would do well to brush it aside as Stevenson did, except that here again we find excellent rhetorical success. The tale itself, if it is a tale, is neither big enough nor clear enough to discuss aside from its fine writing.

In "Admiral Guinea" we are introduced to that wicked old rascal <u>David Pew</u> and take a keen interest in the character drawing of this blind desperate seaman whose tapping stick does its part in the setting of the plot in "Treasure Island". If the play has done nothing else it has given us the complete characterization of this old pirate who, in spite of the wickedness of his ways, never fails to attract and is one of the most remarkable of Stevenson's many remarkable characters. Aside from <u>Pew</u> the play lacks in interest and <u>Pew</u> is, really, the play itself. It was printed three years after "Treasure Island" was started in serial form, and <u>Pew</u>'s character developed <u>after</u> his death in "Treasure Island" but wholly in keeping with the blind beggar whose tapping stick made such a vivid impression on <u>Jim</u>.

Altogether these dramas are, for Stevenson, but a trial expedition into a far country, What he saw there failed to please; what he did failed to inspire. He did wisely to turn back before he had ranged too far a-field and to return to those haunts he knew best. Toward the end of his life it seems to have been suggested to him that he write another drama, and his reply was that "the work of falsification which a play demands is of all tasks the most ungrateful", and that he "will not write a play for Irving, nor for the devil". The failure hurt. But he made the mistake of approaching the theater as a toy to be played with, due largely to the fact that he did not know the theater, had seen less plays than the average



high school boy, and had never in fact been inside the theater until he was twenty years of age. Had he got into proper relations with the facts of the theater, had he studied it as he studied the historical setting of his historical novels, who can prophecy what his efforts might have meant to the theater-going world.

The poetry of Stevenson as poetry is so vastly inferior to the prose that one wishes he had not tried the experiment of making verses. Stevenson was a speaker, not a singer. It is not unreasonable to expect more from the maker of a prose that is almost poetry, flawless in composition from start to finish, with dignity and artistic beauty no matter what the theme might be. Stevenson's best poems are his ballads. He had a story to tell and, as usual, he told it well. Ticonderoga is really fine. In the two long narrative poems, "The Ballad of Rahero" and "The Feast of Famine", the reader is thrilled by the story but the form is not poetic. The Scotch dialect poems are better suited to the familiar, conversational method characteristic of his poetic utterances but even here his genius speaks and does not sing.

Not many of Stevenson's poems could stand the test of Milton's requirements of poetry - that it should be simple, sensuous, passionate. A few might. Here and there one finds true poetry clothed in its proper form. The thought of the best known of his "Underwoods" hints of the emotion and passionate feeling of the true poet but it was hard for Stevenson to break through his natural reserve and reveal passionate thought. Mr. Swinnerton says of him in this connection:

"Over his heart he kept the watchful guard of a Protestant Scotsman. It was unmoved, a secret, not to be known. It did not inform his work, in which there is sometimes a heat of composition, or even a heat of feeling, but never the cold heat of profound and piercing emotion. That he was capable of being easily moved, that he loved virtue and hated cruelty and wrong, these things are true. That he could grow hot with calumny, as he did in the defence of Father Damien, is equally true.

Robert Louis Stevenson, A critical study, by Frank Swinnerton



But these things are the signs of a prudent man, eagerly interested in life, rather taking pleasure in the thought that he is hot to attack injustice; not of a profound thinker or of a poet. They warm us with, perhaps, affection for Stevenson; they keep alive our admiration for him as an attractive figure in our literary history. They do not thrill us, because they appeal to the interest and excitement and honesty and feeling. The poetic thought in his "Requiem" has gained an added hister because, in its eight short lines, we find the fine courage of his life expressed. It does not need the poetic form to help us realize the depth of emotion in his last wish:

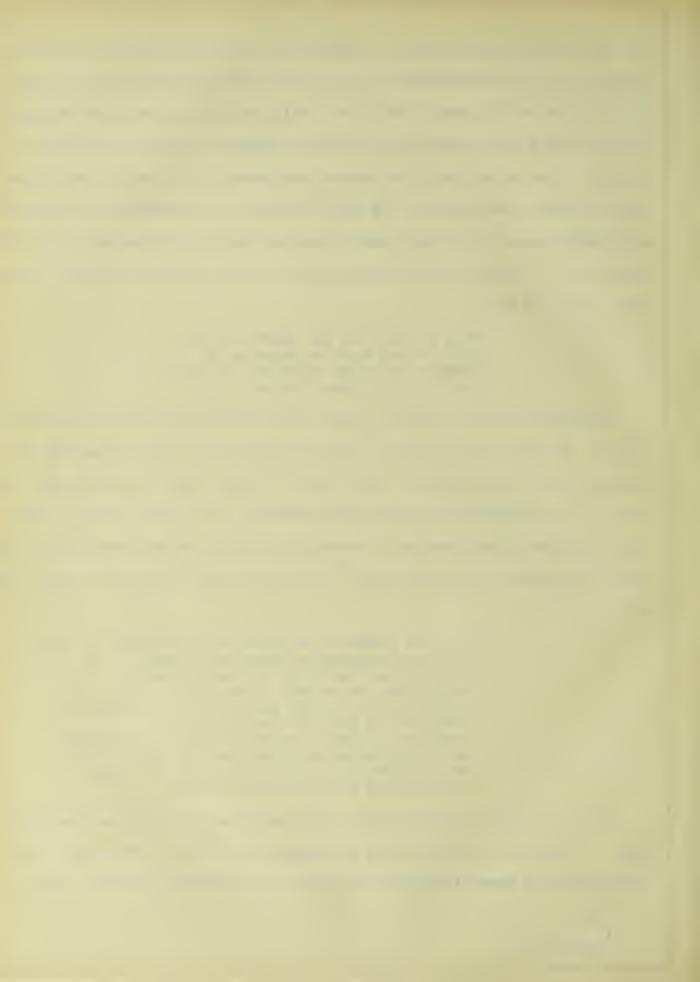
"This be the verse you 'grave for me; Here he lies where he longed to be Horee is the sailor, home from the sea, And the hunter home from the hill."

Stevenson's "Child's Garden of Verse" has enjoyed more popularity then "Underwoods". But even here he fails to strike the poetic note that his American contemporary, Fugene Field, struck. Field writes of normal children, sad and gay, bad and good, with sympathy and thorough understanding of the child's point of view. Field's children seldom moralize. Stevenson's children not only moralize but the moralizing savours of a grown up mind. No one of Field's boys would or does sing of

"....the crowds of the stars that looked down upon me, And that glittered and winked in the dark.
The Dog, and Plough, and the Hunter, and all, And the star of the sailor, and Mars,
These shone in the sky, and the pail by the wall Would be half full of water and stars.
They saw me at last, and they chased me with cries, And they soon had me packed into bed;
But the glory kept shining and bright in my eyes, And the stars going round in my head."

There is, in this quotation, the subtle suggestion and thought of the mature mind. It suggests the lonely child in the same way as that of "The Land of Nod", "My Shadow", The Unseen Playmate", "The Land of Story Books", and that pathetic

Poems, p. 22.



memory of his sick childhood "The Land of Counterpane". They sing of an unusual childhood and there is the subtle presence of the man who is remembering. Field's childhood songs are sung by the man who has again become the little boy with his horde of foolish little treasures, important boyish secrets and games, and unlimited companionship with boys of his own kind and persuasion. There is a richer, deeper more sympathetic poetic note in Field's poetry. There is a smoother rhythm and a harmony between sense and sound that make the poems adaptable to the musician's need. Nowhere in all Stevenson's "Child's Garden of Verses" is struck the note of dignified pathos that we find in Field's "Little Boy Blue", and none of Stevenson's single poetic efforts have reached such heights as Field's lullabies.

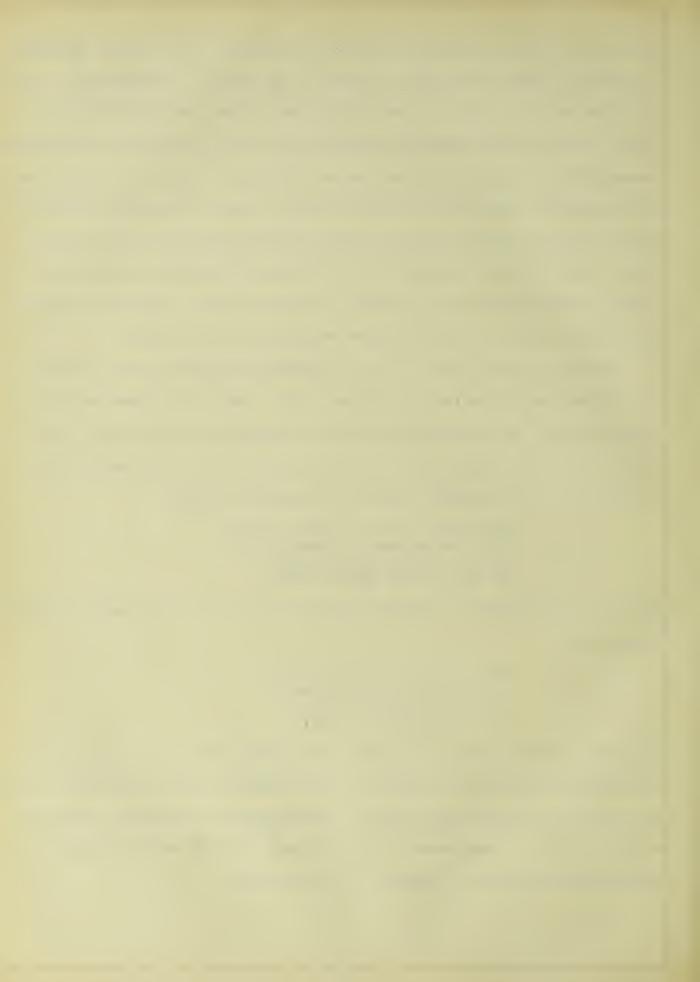
Some of Stevenson's poetry seems a deliberate playing with words and rhyme it is almost doggered of the most flippant type. There is the instance of "The
friendly cow all red and white" which has the charming qualification of giving
"Cream with all her might, To eat with apple tart." There is the foolish prosy
conclusion, out of all harmony with poetic thought, in "System":

"The child that is not clean and neat, With lots of toys and things to eat, He is a naughty child, I'm sure Or else his dear papa is poor."

And where in the kingdom of rhymsters can one find a more absurd liberty with poetic license than:

"The rain is falling all around,
It falls on field and tree,
It rains on umbrellas here,
And on the ships at sea" 4

One likes to think that these ridiculous efforts were merely brain phantoms penciled upon the margin of a newspaper in an idle moment of self forgetfulness. However, Stevenson is not wholly lacking in the atmosphere of childhood. One turns with relief from such patent effort at rhyming in "Good and Bad Children" to that delightful breath of a summer's day in childhood:



The Swing

"How do you like to go up in a swing,
Up in the air so blue?
Oh, I do think it the pleasantest thing
Ever a child can do!

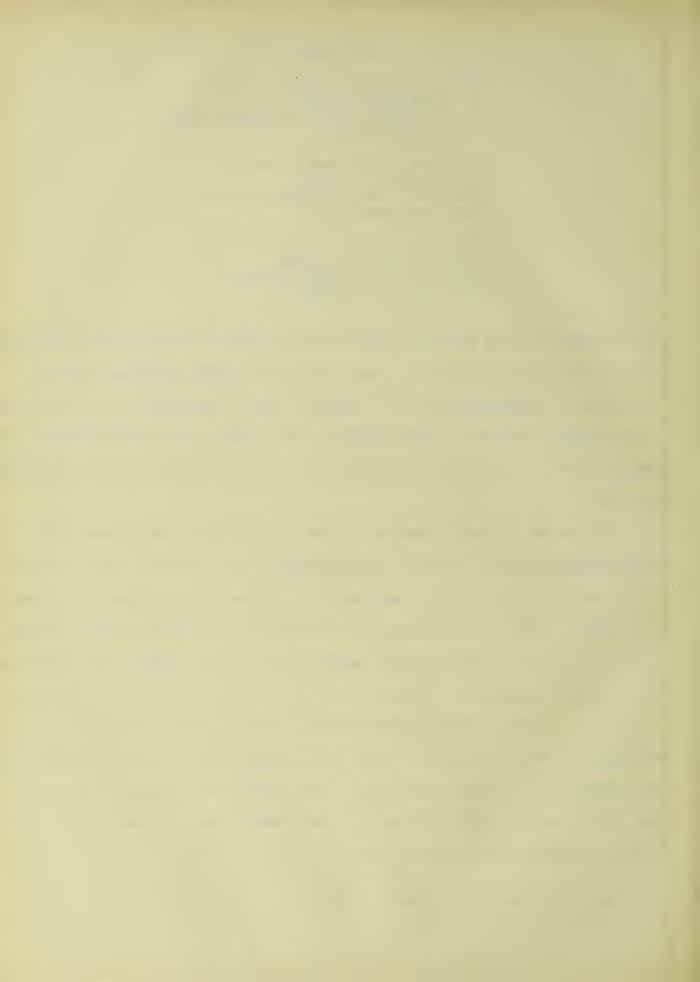
Up in the air and over the wall, Till I can see so wide, Rivers and trees and cattle and all Over the country side.

Till I look down on the garden green, Down on the roof so brown Up in the air I go flying again, Up in the air and down."

Unconsciously we swing with him "up in the air so blue". Where Stevenson excelled with children is in his letters to them. Those delightful whimsical letters written in his vagabonding days to "Tomarcher" must have delighted the soul of his little reader, so young that they had to be read to him. One can fancy without any stretch of the imagination the round-eyed wonder of any toddler at such information as this:

"You may care to hear, Tomarcher, about the children in these parts; their parents obey them, they do not obey their parents; and I am sorry to tell you (for I dare say you are already thinking the idea a good one) that it does not pay one half penny. There are three sorts of civilization, Tomarcher: the real old-fashioned one, in which children either had to find out how to please their dear papas, or their dear papa cut their heads off. This style did very well, but is now out of fashion. Then the modern European style: in which children have to behave reasonably well, and go to school and say their prayers, or their dear papas will know the reason why. This does fairly well. Then there is the South Sea plan, which does not do one bit. The children beat their parents here; it does not make their parents any better; so do not try it."

Son of William Archer, aged 3 years.

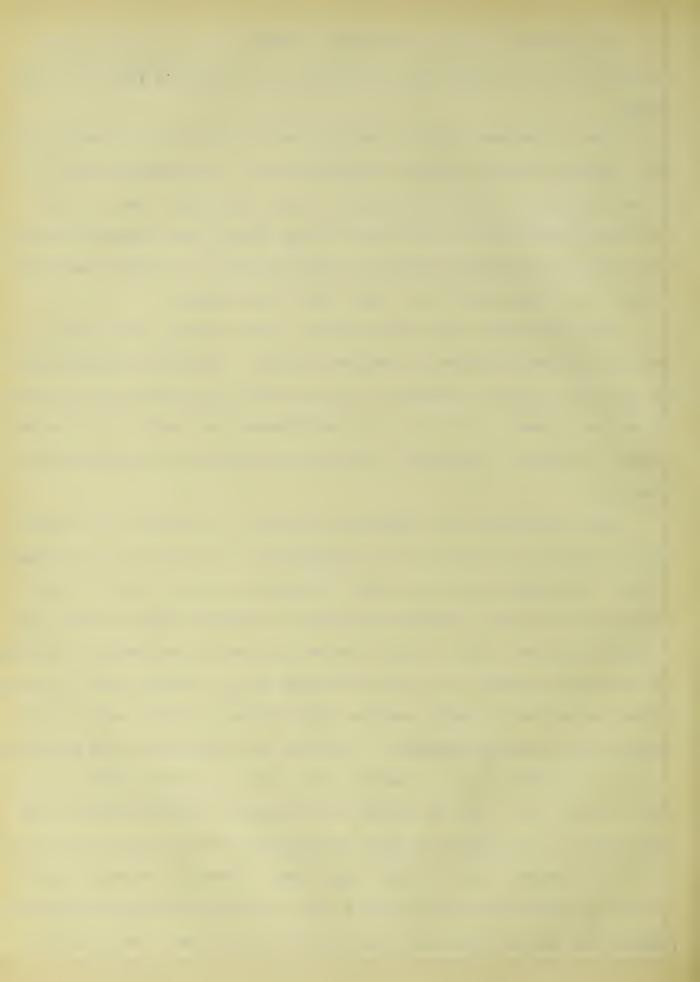


In a subsequent letter to "Tomarcher" Stevenson writes the fascinating details of the life and amusements of children in this fairy-story land in the South Seas.

There is also the "grown up" correspondence with little Miss Ide whose birth-day happened, out of all reason on Christmas Day and to whom Stevenson with due solemnity and wholly in accordance with all legal requirements transferred his birthday (November 13th) to her for her especial use, the only stipulation being that she use it well, "said birthday not being so young as it once was, and having carried me in a very satisfactory manner since I can remember."

His correspondence with his step-grandson, Austin Strong is calculated to arouse the wholesome interest and respect of any lad. They are dilightfully full of the detail so dear to childheart of the very things about which Austin was keenly anxious to know. In fact, no letter that Stevenson ever wrote of which we have record is lacking in that quality of interest and spontaneity so delightful to his readers.

Letter writing may not be referred to, perhaps, as literature, and it may be that a discussion of his ability as a correspondent is out of place in this connection. Surely there is no truer index to personality and native ability of the writer than the letters he writes when stripped of conscious effort for style and literary technique. Here it is also that we find revealed the continuous strivings of Stevenson to perfect his art, and the strength of his literary courage. In this collection we find the "happy, heartless pagan"striking the sadder note, at times. Once in awhile a morbid despondency is revealed. But nowhere do we find him commonplace. His outlook on life is too fresh and hopeful to be common place, his interests are too varied. Some one refers to his Letters as "Familiar Studies of Men and Books". In the letters one finds delightfully crisp criticisms of the men and books that interested him, not forgetting his own. There is a wholesome mixture of the every day life in which he took a part or which passed in review before him, and the more serious reflections on the science and art of man. He flits, will-



o'the wisp like between a dozen different objects and projects in a single letter, but there is always a thin thread of connection which holds our interest.

Nothing that he has left to us so reveals the man and his art of fiction as well as his art of living, as these letters which, a few years before his death, he begs his friend Sidney Colvin to keep as "they might make good pickings after I am dead." These "pickings" have proved to be his best biography, for here we see in these familiar letters all his passing shades of character, theories on art, and literary criticism of the most direct, brief and breezy nature. He touches the happenings of his world with amusing directness and refreshing candor, very unlike his more finished style. His earlier letters are the most amusing. The later correspondence, particularly after his cruise in the South Seas, are more serious.

It is delightful revelation to read in these letters what he thinks of his own writings. He liked most his own stories immensely, and said so, - read them many times, "but I never read 'The Black Arrow'". He wrote his father on one occasion that after listening to a reading from "Thrawn Janet" he was "quite his bowled over" by his own work. One of his favourites among books was "David Balfour, a nice little book, and very artistic, and just the thing to occupy the leisure of a busy life; but for the top flower of a man's life it seems to be inadequate. I could have wished to be otherwise busy in this world. I ought to have been able to build lighthouses and write David Balfours, too."

Stevenson has been accused of taking every mirror into his confidence. What he saw there he has revealed in various letters, a composite of which might read (and these are exact quotations) "A strange person; not so lean, say experts, but infinitely battered.... High and very narrow. Upon the lungs I will not linger. The heart is large enough for a ball room, the belly greedy and inefficient, the brain stocked with the most dammable explosives like a dynamiter's den. The whole place is well furnished, though not in very pure taste: Corinthian much of it; showy and not strong.... A mere complication of cough and bones, much fitter for



an emblem of mortality than a bride groom.... The pallid brute that lived at Skerryvore, like a weevil in a biscuit."

During his life time Stevenson was in correspondence with many of the most distinguished of his literary contemporaries. Frequent letters passed between him and George Meredith, J. M. Barrie, Henry James, Conan Doyle, Edmund Gosse, Kipling, Symonds, Stoddard, Henley and a dozen others of lesser fame. letters are delightfully informal in their frank praise and frank criticism, and leads one to believe that the friendliest of relations existed between Stevenson and the recipients of these letters, some of whom he knew only through correspondence. It was after fame came to him in Samoa that the list of correspondents grew beyond his personal control, for friends came to him through his stories and essays and travel books, and knocked for admission. He might have busied himself entirely with these new admirers but he could not sacrifice the old for the new and we find him with his Amanuensis setting aside a part of each day for correspondence. It was never a burden. He rejoiced in the task and was never so busy but that he might turn aside for a "bit of a chat" with the friends beyond the seas. We find him, even on the last day, and the busiest, of his life enswering the kindly letters of distant friends received but two days since and still bright in memory."

Stevenson's writings have meant many things to many men; critics do not agree as to which of his many groups of writings rank higher than others; friends will not agree that any should be condemned. But there is perfect accord as to his correspondence. Stripped of conscious effort of style and literary technique there stands revealed the man just as he lived and worked and thought; a brave, beautiful life with one lesson to teach to the world - the duty of cheerfulness.



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